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ABSTRACT

The outcomes attained by Australian adults enrolled in competency-based Certificate in Adult Foundation Education (CAFE) courses were examined. Special attention was paid to the outcomes achieved by students in the two lowest of the CAFE program's four levels. The main data sources were as follows: literature review; enrollment data from the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Student Information System; questionnaires circulated to all 74 TAFE colleges with students enrolled in the relevant levels of CAFE; in-depth interviews with four CAFE teachers from four TAFE colleges selected to provide a representative picture of CAFE at the lower levels in New South Wales (NSW); and interviews with three key figures involved in adult basic education (ABE) curriculum development. Although the teachers saw CAFE as resulting in a wide range of benefits for learners, their support for CAFE was by no means unanimous. CAFE was found to vary by geographic region, college size, funding, and local interpretations of the CAFE syllabus. CAFE was said to not be meeting the learning needs of all entry-level ABE students. Concern was expressed about the reduction of diversity of ABE provision in TAFE in NSW. In addition, teachers consistently expressed concern about the difficulty with appropriate placement in levels of the course, the time needed by some students to achieve their learning goals, assessment, and results. (Ten tables/figures are included. Contains 77 references.) (MN)

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Centre for Language and Literacy

Student Outcomes

Investigating competency-based curriculum in adult basic education

Pat Hazell

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	adult basic education
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ACTRAC	Australian Committee for Training Curriculum
ALAN	adult literacy and numeracy
ALBE	adult literacy and basic education
ALLP	Australian's Language and Literacy Policy
ALIO	Adult Literacy Information Office
ALO	Adult literacy officer
AMES	Adult Migrant Education Service
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
CABE	Certificate in Adult Basic Education (TAFE NSW)
CAFE	Certificate in Adult Foundation Education (TAFE NSW)
CBT	competency based training
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CGE	Certificate in General Education (TAFE NSW)
CGEA (1)	Certificate in General Education for Adults (TAFE VIC) (Version 1, accredited 1992)
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English (AMES NSW)
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
ESB	English speaking background
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages (TAFE NSW)
FSTD	Foundation Studies Training Division
ILCM	Interim Literacy Course Matrix
Lit/Num Prevoc	*Literacy and Numeracy Prevocational* (TAFE NSW)
NESB	non-English speaking background
NFROT	National Framework for Recognition of Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRS	National Reporting System
NTRA	National Training Reform Agenda
RAWFA	Reading and Writing for Adults (TAFE NSW)
SAAFE	Statement of Attainment in Adult Foundation Education
SIP	Special Intervention Program
SIS	Student Information System
TESOL	teaching English to speakers of other languages
TAFE	Technical And Further Education
VEETAC	Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee
VET	vocational education and training

TERMINOLOGY

Literacy — Where possible, the terms *literacy and numeracy*, or *literacy, numeracy and language* have been used. However, when the term *literacy* has been used, it is used in relation to adult literacy in a general context, and covers all provision of basic education for adults.

ABE — ABE (adult basic education) is generally accepted in TAFE NSW as the umbrella term to cover the field of literacy and numeracy learning, and in this research refers only to NSW provision.

ALBE — ALBE (adult literacy and basic education) has been used when referring to literacy and numeracy provision nationally.

Entry level learners — This term is used to refer to learners beginning study at the lower two stages of CAFE, although it is noted that learners can enter CAFE at any of the four stages of the course. It is also used to refer to learners entering TAFE ABE learning in *Literacy and Numeracy Prevocational.*

Stage — This report includes the use of the terms *stages* and *levels*. In the CAFE curriculum, learner levels are referred to as *stages*, and this term has been used to refer to the stages of CAFE throughout this report.

Level — The term *level* has been used where a more general description of placement in learning levels is required.

PREFACE

This report outlines the findings of a research project which investigated the implications of implementing an accredited adult basic education course, namely the NSW *Certificate in Adult Foundation Education* (CAFE), for students enrolled in the two lower stages.

It is argued that a point of tension exists in CAFE between established ABE provision and the demands placed on it by the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) for vocational education and training (VET) courses to be competency-based. This raises questions about whether CAFE can meet the learning needs of the student group at the lower levels of TAFE provision, who are the focus of the research project. The research explored this question through the experiences of teachers implementing CAFE in a selection of TAFE colleges in NSW. By conducting research with the teachers who have been responsible for implementating the curriculum, it has been possible to draw conclusions about some implications of implementing CAFE for the target group of students.

The results of the research indicate that although there are many positive outcomes for learners enrolled in the two lower levels of CAFE and many of the intended outcomes of the course are achieved, the ABE learning needs of some students are not met by the curriculum. These findings suggest the necessity for the continuation of choices of ABE provision within TAFE in NSW, so that access to institutional learning remains an option for all learners at the beginning stages of literacy and numeracy learning. Recommendations are made about future directions and further research for learners at the two lower levels of CAFE.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the research

In 1995 the *Certificate of Adult Foundation Education* (CAFE) was implemented in TAFE NSW. CAFE brought with it some fundamental changes to the provision of adult basic education (ABE).

A new course had become a necessity because the accreditation period for the previous course, the *Certificate in Adult Basic Education* (CABE), had expired. The need for a new course coincided with the arrival of the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA), with its shift to competency-based training (CBT). CBT enabled a major shift to occur at that time, namely the development of a training market, with a change in emphasis from funding inputs to purchasing outcomes. This had a major impact on the development of CAFE.

The main informing document for curriculum development at the time was the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT), so CAFE needed to combine both the requirements of ABE learners and the changed requirements of accreditation. The writing of CAFE also provided an opportunity to fill any gaps that existed previously in ABE provision. Writing a course that combined these needs was a long and complex process. Safeguarding ABE principles of good practice within structures of a competency-based curriculum was a challenge bound to result in some unforeseen outcomes. The resulting CAFE is therefore very different to CABE.

One of the major differences is the inclusion of learners at the lower end of ABE provision in an accredited course. For the first time an accredited course in TAFE NSW had been made available to these learners, with staged learning, pathways to further vocational and general education, assessment requirements and full-time study options; structures which are some of the non-negotiable features of accreditation under the NTRA. This fundamental shift in ABE provision inevitably has implications for entry-level learners.

In the shift to a competency-based course, the danger existed that the needs of learners may become secondary to economic and political agendas. This was a concern expressed by ABE researchers such as Shilton (1994) and Sanguinetti (1995). Sanguinetti, in her research report *Negotiating Competence*

(1995, p 48) questions the extent to which the values of learner-centredness and social and individual development risk being compromised by the competency-based approach. These values are deeply espoused by ABE teacher practitioners. Lee and Wickert (1994b, p 58) note this in their comment that teachers' beliefs and principles about adult literacy teaching vary little across institutional and geographic sites, and across recent time.

As a CAFE coordinator and teacher, I had been involved with students at these lower levels of study who were affected by the introduction of an accredited course. As we worked to implement the course, some difficulties arose for these students, who had a long history of educational failure or lack of education. I became concerned that implementing some of the course structures could undermine the gains they were making as learners in ABE. This report documents the research which was a response to these concerns.

Aim of the research

This research project aimed to discover the effect of the non-negotiable structures of a course accredited to meet NTRA requirements for learners at the entry level of ABE. Related to this was a further aim, to investigate whether foundational ABE principles have been successfully accommodated within CAFE. In addition, the research aimed to locate CAFE in the broader policy shifts of time.

Specifically, this research attempted to discover, by talking to teachers, what the implications of implementing CAFE are for learners enrolled in the two lower levels of CAFE. The four levels of CAFE are known as stages F, S, T and D; F and S being the lower levels and the focus of this research. The intention of this research was to focus on the learner, and on learner issues in a competency-based course.

Methodology

The main methods of research were:

1. the examination of relevant literature
2. the retrieval of information from TAFE's Student Information System (SIS) to provide factual background data of enrolment and results patterns in CAFE
3. questionnaires circulated to all colleges with students enrolled in the relevant levels of CAFE. These were designed to provide a statewide overview, and to inform question design for the in-depth interviews

4. in-depth interviews in four colleges, selected to provide a representative picture of CAFE at the lower levels in NSW
5. interviews with key figures to contextualise ABE curriculum development and the implementation of policy, through the design of CAFE.

Significance of the research project

This is the first widespread investigation into CAFE. The impact of the introduction of CBT for entry-level learners has not yet been subject to scrutiny. This report provides the findings of one of the few investigations of this impact and raises important planning issues. Its significance concerns the provision of adequate ABE programs to meet the diverse needs of all learners at the entry point of literacy and numeracy programs in NSW. This report also puts forward suggestions for further investigations into ABE curricula.

Limitations of the research

It was beyond the possibility of this project to investigate the relevant issues to any greater extent than was undertaken. As a result, the work reported here could usefully be built on with further research, in which learner issues are explored directly with the students enrolled in this ABE course. Sanguinetti (1995, p 33) articulated this, calling for research into students' perceptions of their learning experiences in competency-based courses, including assessment and accreditation, and the learner pathways they follow. It is to be hoped that further research will be undertaken to provide a more complete picture of the implications of CBT in courses such as CAFE for learners at entry levels in ABE.

It was also beyond the scope of this project to conduct in-depth interviews with more than the four colleges sampled. However, it is considered that the colleges selected provide a fair representation of CAFE provision in NSW.

In TAFE NSW statements of attainment have been awarded for achievement of lower levels of CAFE. These are called *Statements of Attainment in Adult Foundation Education* (SAAFE) (see p 33 for details). These courses were accredited in October, 1995. For this reason teachers who participated in this investigation had little or no experience of SAAFE, and so it was not appropriate to include SAAFE as part of this project.

Summary of findings

A more detailed summary is provided in Chapter 7.

Implementing CAFE has been seen by teachers to result in a wide range of benefits for learners. However, the picture that results from the data is by no means a unanimous expression of support for CAFE, and some teachers have expressed difficulties as they work to achieve good outcomes for learners in a new competency-based context.

This research aimed to investigate the implications of implementing CAFE for learners who are enrolled at the two lower levels, F and S. The question was posed whether CAFE meets the learning needs of this group of students, and the findings are the result of investigations with some of the teachers who have been implementing the curriculum.

Some generalisations have become apparent from the data collected and are outlined below. In spite of these generalisations, the picture of CAFE that has emerged from the research is one of diversity. The course is seen as different CAFEs in different situations. The diversity is a result of many factors, the most significant of which is the variety of students themselves, with their differing needs and abilities. Variations in geographic location, college size, funding, local interpretations of the CAFE syllabus and teachers' individual responses have all lead to the success and struggles described in the report. The need for a course to meet this diversity was recognised by the project manager for the writing of CAFE. Referring to the writing of CAFE, he said:

> A lock-step hierarchical progression through content couldn't accommodate individuals' diverse needs, or the totally different nature of groups across the state. It [the CAFE] was deliberately set up to cope with this diversity ... in the context of a huge statewide system it was difficult to see what alternatives there were without developing a number of different courses.

It is not intended that this report offer any summative statements about either CAFE's success or lack of it — it is not an evaluation of CAFE. Rather it is an attempt to listen to and interpret what teachers have to say about the ways CAFE has impacted on learners. This has meant listening to individual teachers talk about individual students. The work has revealed a broad picture, while keeping one of ABE's underpinning principles, meeting the need of individual learners, in sight. Some generalisations have been drawn from the findings.

The most consistent finding was that although the F and S stages of the course were found to retain the positive outcomes of other ABE courses, CAFE does not meet the learning needs of all entry-level ABE students. Concern was expressed about the reduction of diversity of ABE provision in TAFE NSW.

The course was found to offer a broader range of outcomes than previous courses offered. In addition, a course that offers learner pathways to entry level learners was found to be more focussing for this student group. Teachers consistently raised a number of issues which impacted on learners, such as difficulty with appropriate placement in levels of the course, the time needed by some students to achieve their learning goals and issues related to assessment and results. Further issues arose in relation to study at F stage and study in composite classes.

Chapter 6, explores these matters in detail.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1 provides a context for the CAFE course, with a brief history of adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) in Australia, and its underpinning philosophies. The relationship between the NTRA and the literacy/numeracy and language fields is explored, as are assessment and accountability issues. The evolution of ABE courses in TAFE NSW is traced.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framing of the research by examining the shift of focus in course provision in the literacy/numeracy and language fields brought about by the NTRA, as well as the responses from these fields. The part NTRA has played in the writing of CAFE is examined, as well as some of the implications for students and teachers involved with the course.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the structures of the CAFE course. First an overview of the course is given, followed by descriptions of the course content, levels of learning, the intended learning outcomes, the assessment procedures, and achievement of the award. Other related ABE courses provided in TAFE are also described. The description of the CAFE course provides a context for the interpretation of the research findings.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology used in the research project.

Chapter 5 provides a brief description of the student population and the local situation for each of the colleges included in the in-depth interviews. The interpretation of CAFE in each situation is briefly described.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the findings from the questionnaire responses, and from the interviews. In the case of each finding, references from the CAFE manual and data provided by the project manager for the development of CAFE are included. The main finding is supported by evidence from interviewees and from questionnaire responses. Conclusions from the research are drawn.

Chapter 7 presents a summary of the research findings.

Chapter 8 presents conclusions drawn from the research findings.

Chapter 9 suggests recommendations that arise from the research project.

1. CONTEXT FOR CAFE

To provide a context for CAFE and its implications for learners, the history of the provision of ABE in NSW needs to be briefly outlined. This will uncover the underpinning principles of ABE and show how the courses in TAFE have accommodated them, as well as demonstrating how CAFE has worked to maintain these principles, while at the same time accommodating the requirements of the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA).

The shifts in adult literacy practice from learner-centred, unaccredited tuition to the present competency-based courses were reflected and embodied in the ABE courses that emerged in TAFE colleges. During the 1970s and 1980s, literacy provision boomed in Australia and in NSW the growth was enormous. ABE provision evolved, reflecting the philosophies and pedagogies that were dominant at the time.

History of influences on ABE provision

A key figure in adult basic education (ABE) in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, Kath White, traced the influences that shaped adult literacy practice in Australia at that time in a discussion paper (1985). Her paper provides background to some of the principles that underpin the field.

According to White, the first emphasis in the early 1970s was derived from the application of school-based methodology to the teaching of non-literate adults, a methodology which was word and sound centred. The second major emphasis emerging in the mid-70s, focused on the centrality of the individual student's own circumstances and interests, recognising the need for relevance in lessons for learners. This led to the use of 'authentic' learning materials. In the late 1970s, the emphasis shifted to *psycholinguistics*, expounded by Frank Smith (1978) and Kenneth and Yetta Goodman (1980), where the primacy of meaning was paramount. This led to the advocacy of the *language experience* method which recognised and valued the spoken language and experiences of the learner. In the 1980s, a new emphasis on writing emerged, and students were encouraged to document their world, and were given increasing opportunities to see their work published.

Paulo Freire's visit to Melbourne in 1972 raised issues about the recognition of social inequities, and the role of adult education in social change. This led to greater political commitment in Victoria (as seen in Grant's discussion paper, *Opportunity to do Brilliantly*, 1987), with ripples felt in other states.

This was important to Australian adult literacy provision, though Freire's methods of teaching literacy were not altogether transferable to the English language or the Australian culture. Nevertheless, Freire's philosophy was adopted by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL). ACAL had an important role in the national exchange of ideas through conferences and publications.

During the 1970s, ABE provision in TAFE NSW was mainly through the work of volunteer tutors, working one-to-one with students, and supported by a professional coordinator, an Adult Literacy Officer (ALO). This form of provision still exists in the late 1990s, but now is much reduced as a result of the push to professionalise ABE teaching. The importance of accreditation and qualifications for teachers emerged and grew in the 1980s, and led to the marginalisation of volunteerism as a form of provision. By 1985, accredited courses for literacy teachers in tertiary institutions were being offered.

The dominant mode of provision in the 1980s became the teaching of groups of learners with a six-to-one ratio by a professional teacher. In TAFE NSW, the literacy course was called *Reading and Writing for Adults* (*RAWFA*), and its numeracy equivalent was called *Maths Workshop*.

In 1990 these two subjects were combined in one program to become the unaccredited course, *Literacy and Numeracy Prevocational* (*Lit/Num Prevoc*). A third subject was *Literacy Assistance with a Volunteer Tutor* , and volunteer provision became institutionalised. At the same time, the TAFE subjects that had been known as *Refresher English* and *Refresher Maths*, and which had been designed for students who needed additional literacy or numeracy skills to succeed in their enrolled courses, were combined in one subject and named *Tutorial Support*. *Tutorial Support* allowed ABE teachers to offer literacy and numeracy support to students in technical and vocational courses, and became a major part of ABE provision in TAFE NSW, a position which it currently retains. Since 1991, *Lit/Num Prevoc* and *Tutorial Support* have together been the cornerstone of TAFE ABE provision. *Lit/Num Prevoc* is currently due for review, and TAFE policy dictates that it must be replaced by a course that is accredited.

White's history provides the origins of the following principles: the centrality of the learner, the importance of teaching with materials relevant to the learner, the recognition of the importance of individuals and their life experiences, and social justice issues. It was in the 1980s that statements of principles were articulated and the literacy field became more organised and less marginalised. The modes of provision continue to accommodate these principles, and have been restated in ABE documents many times over the ensuing years. Lee and Wickert, in *Deconstructing Adult Literacy Teaching*

(1994b, pp 58-67) examine some of the texts where teachers' beliefs and principles were stated. They too found a commitment to learner-centred teaching and to individualised tuition that was not bound by set curricula or inflexible structures. This was, and still is, seen by many to be the essence of the ABE field; and to be its strength (Seddon 1994). Another expression of the underlying principles of ABE is documented in the ABC/TAFE Television *Literacy Teaching Series Concept Paper* (Bilton 1992).

Reasons for national training reform in Australia

While the concept of meeting individual needs of adult learners is still central in literacy and numeracy provision, the influence of national economic agendas has been felt. Black (1995) describes the shift in literacy provision, as a move from meeting the felt needs of individuals in the 1970s and 1980s, to the current corporate federalist position, in which literacy provision is seen by governments, industry and union leaders to have a centre stage role in meeting the needs of the national economy. While the 'primacy of the individual' as a principle (White 1983) still applies from the point of view of most teachers, much funding for ABE is now targeted to meet the economic needs of the nation (Black 1995).

ABE in TAFE NSW has undergone major changes in response to national agendas in the restructuring of work. These changes have impacted on education and training throughout Australia. Much training in TAFE has become competency based in response to the new demands generated by the NTRA (for further details see p 17). Anderson (1995) gives a brief history of the changes in education:

> ... from the system of the early 1970s based on principles of free public access, social equity, democratic participation, cooperation and the public interest to one in the 1990s characterised by user pays, economic efficiency, corporate managerialism, competition and private interests.

He outlines changes from the Whitlam government's *Kangan Report* (Kangan 1974), where TAFE was able to promote programs of access and equity with assistance to the socially and educationally disadvantaged, to the late 1980s era of economic rationalism. These changes were the ones referred to as the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA), and led to a shift to competency-based education, which was seen as a powerful vehicle to deliver a more responsible, flexible, articulated and relevant vocational and education training (VET) system. It was at this time that the interests of corporate managerialism and economic efficiency became prominent, leading to changes in education driven by the government's response to pressure from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for

Australia to become more competitive internationally. The changes in education were influenced by the Finn (1991), Mayer (1992) and Carmichael (1992) reports, which promoted stronger links between school and work. Language, literacy and numeracy were seen as key skills for the new vision of a national, flexible and mobile workforce. Some of the literacy and language field responded to the NTRA by developing the *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence* (ACTRAC, 1993). This aimed to 'facilitate the design, delivery and possible certification of curricula for adult English as a second language, adult literacy and basic education' (Coates, 1993). This was an informing document for CAFE (CAFE Manual, Vol 1, Section 1, Part D, p 49).

Assessment and accountability

The issue of assessment in ABE has reflected the shifts in emphases in the field. Coates (1993) describes how the need for accountability for the use of public funding increased in the late 1980s and 1990s. She argues that the provision of language and literacy tuition in TAFE as a result of the discourse of 'open access to educational programs' and 'equality of opportunities' (1993, p 61) did not provide evidence that open access actually resulted in greater equality of opportunities. At that time, assessment was seen as a matter primarily for learners. Previously, ABE practice in TAFE NSW had embraced the philosophies of Good and Holmes (1978), who focused on the need for assessment to encourage those learners who have a background of educational failure to assess themselves, together with their tutors. Kohl's levels of learning viz: *Beginning, Not Bad* or *With Ease* (1974) were used now to describe learning, not just of skills, but of attitude and knowledge as well. Assessment was non-test based, and stressed the subjective nature of the assessment of learners' progress. This was consistent with the learner-centred philosophy of ABE.

Coates (1993) documents the shift in the late 1980s to *quality* education, rather than *access* and *equality*, and the absence of assessment tools to provide evidence of quality that was being demanded by funding bodies. This left program providers vulnerable to accusations of a welfarist approach, irrelevant to 'real' vocational education and training. In 1991 the *Interim Literacy Course Matrix* (ILCM 1992) was developed 'as a mechanism for adult literacy practitioners to assist decisions by the CES about placement of clients into suitable courses' (ACAL 1992). This was a movement towards focusing on course outcomes rather than individual outcomes and ABE courses could be mapped onto the matrix. A deliberate attempt was being made by the literacy, numeracy and language teaching fields to reject the imposition of descriptive yet prescriptive standardised rating scales (The ALAN Scales,

Griffin & Forwood 1991) as a measure of accountability, which aimed to provide the public accountability increasingly demanded (Coates, 1992, p 62). Recommendations to assist considerations of assessment issues are offered in the research project, *Comparison and Evaluation of Adult Literacy Assessment Practices* (Falk 1995).

National training reform brought with it the need for a national common reporting tool. This need eventually led to the design of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (VEETAC, 1991). The *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence* (National Framework) (ACTRAC 1993 a) could be mapped onto the NQF, and provided a reference point for describing student achievement in language literacy and numeracy. CAFE too, has been mapped onto the *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence.*

History of accreditation of ABE courses in NSW

The move towards accredited courses in ABE came from several areas. As well as the NTRA and the professionalisation of teachers, learners themselves were perceived to have ABE needs that were not being met by TAFE programs. These various influences resulted in the course descriptions that follow.

i. *Starting points*

In 1986 a new course, *Starting Points*, was trialed as a three-year 'project'. *Starting Points* was a full-time course, the first of its kind in TAFE NSW. Ruth Cohen, who first conceptualised the course, described in an interview (October 1996) how it came into existence:

> We were running ALO programs [Adult Literacy Officer with volunteer tutors] and small classes only. Students were only entitled to come twice weekly, so there was no more time for the students. There were students moving on who then wanted more time to do other things, so we set up a course to offer teaching on a full-time basis. There was a gap we wanted to fill.

From *Starting Points*, students were able to progress to the NSW Year 10 equivalent TAFE course, the *Certificate of General Education* (CGE). *Starting Points* also successfully supported students who wanted access to trade courses. This was an important concept in literacy provision in TAFE at the time. These pathways were called 'articulation' and the conception of linking courses along a pathway had begun. Cohen explained (Interview, October 1996):

> *Starting Points* turned out to be a really good program. We tried to organise areas of learning to make sense, so that they could get jobs, or improve in their jobs — it was fairly vocationally oriented, but included general subjects, though Maths and English were the main things. We could offer them [students] a pathway. There was student demand.

She added:

> It came out of the expressed needs of students ... It meant that learning was pinned down in a more formal way than had existed previously. It acknowledged student progression. But it needed status. CABE was able to offer this.

The push for accreditation of an ABE course was pursued by Marie Persson who followed through Cohen's ideas for *Starting Points* with creativity and vision, leading to the *Certificate in Adult Basic Education* (CABE).

ii. *Certificate in Adult Basic Education*

In 1989 *Starting Points* was formalised in the accreditation of the course, *Certificate in Adult Basic Education*. Marie Persson implemented CABE at Petersham College of TAFE and later supported it as Head of Division of General Studies in TAFE. Helen Kebby, who was part of the implementation team of CABE, gave these reasons (interview, November 1996) for the instigation of the course:

> After the success of *Starting Points*, we wanted to formalise it and put it in a course. There were students who wanted a full time course, *RAWFA* wasn't enough. There were also people who wanted to learn in a bigger group of people ... We wanted a certificate course that was accredited and we wanted to provide them with the learning skills they'd need to move on to the CGE.

Kebby described the course, saying:

> English and Maths were the core. Then there were electives. The object of the electives was to provide literacy or numeracy through a different content area ... When we wrote the course we were really keen to help teachers. We had the fictional 'Wendy in Gulargambone'. Whenever we were not sure about something, we'd say 'What about Wendy in Gulargambone?' So we suggested many activities, for the Wendy factor. We also needed to consider Kooris. There had been a course for Kooris, called *General Skills* ... So the course was organised with this in mind as well as Wendy.

Kebby also talked about the implementation of CABE.

> There was a huge outcry about the imposition of assessment ... It was seen as radical and a sell out to ABE learners to do assessment. We were seen to be pushing a structure on failed school learners. But others welcomed the certificate — the first time a certificate had been in the reach of these learners. As time went on and we continued to give a lot of support it became very well accepted.

Kebby talked about the theoretical underpinnings:

> CABE was based on a psycholinguistic teaching model. You could work through a holistic approach. You looked at contexts that applied to adult learners where the learner would engage (or not) with the literacy or numeracy event that you presented. It happened that it fitted the genre stuff that followed, but that hadn't surfaced then. We used models, we analysed texts according to their purpose. It is how we'd always worked and we knew it suited our learners.

iii. *Certificate in Adult Foundation Education*

In 1994 CABE was due for re-accreditation. By this time the NTRA was in place, and this influenced the shape of the new course, the *Certificate in Adult Foundation Education* (CAFE). Don Colless, the project manager for the writing of CAFE and then Principal Officer of Foundation Studies Training Division, gave the following reasons (interview, October 1996) for CAFE: 'The main reason was that CABE had to be re-accredited'.

He added other reasons:

> We wanted to meet the full-time options for learners at pre-CABE level and to give students direct access to accredited, credit-transferable, technical vocational training. This was different to CABE, where subjects did not have credit transfer. It was a response to demand across the state, especially by Kooris, but others as well. There was a philosophical issue that doing literacy and numeracy without a context was in fact a barrier to learning. CABE was not a context-based course. Good practice in ABE was always contextualised.

He explains differences between CAFE and CABE:

> It was necessary to legitimise the flexibility and innovation that was possible in CABE, but was not recognised ... There were lots of really good things going on in the provision of CABE that were felt not to be 'permitted'. So the new course needed to legitimise this and to be written in a way to give permission to do these innovative things ... There was the need to provide something the CES would buy and they wanted vocational courses.

Colless described how ABE values such as those already documented (p 8) were incorporated in CAFE. This was done through extensive consultation with relevant people and organisations throughout the state, framing of the course structure, the learning outcomes, the assessment criteria, the units of work, the index and the manual itself (see Chapter 4, pp 35, 36). He says:

> CAFE was informed by other curricula, such as CSWE [NSW *Certificate of Spoken and Written English*] and the Victorian CGEA [first version of *Certificate of General Education for Adults*] — we had a reaction away from them. In a simplistic world everyone wants a lock-step hierarchical progression through content. But from an ABE perspective, this couldn't accommodate individual's diverse needs, or the totally different nature of student groups across the state. The CAFE was deliberately set up to cope with this diversity ... In some ways CAFE is a curriculum framework.

The course that resulted is further described in Chapter 4 of this report. Figure 1 (page 15) shows how various ABE courses map onto each other.

Conclusion

This chapter places CAFE in its historical context of ABE provision in NSW, as part of the evolutionary process in education and training. This has meant a shift from a political and educational climate of free access and social equity (realised in ABE by curricula that are based in principles of 'the primacy of the individual') to the current political and economic climate of economic rationalism, with the attendant pressures it has exerted on ABE provision, and which is realised in competency-based curricula.

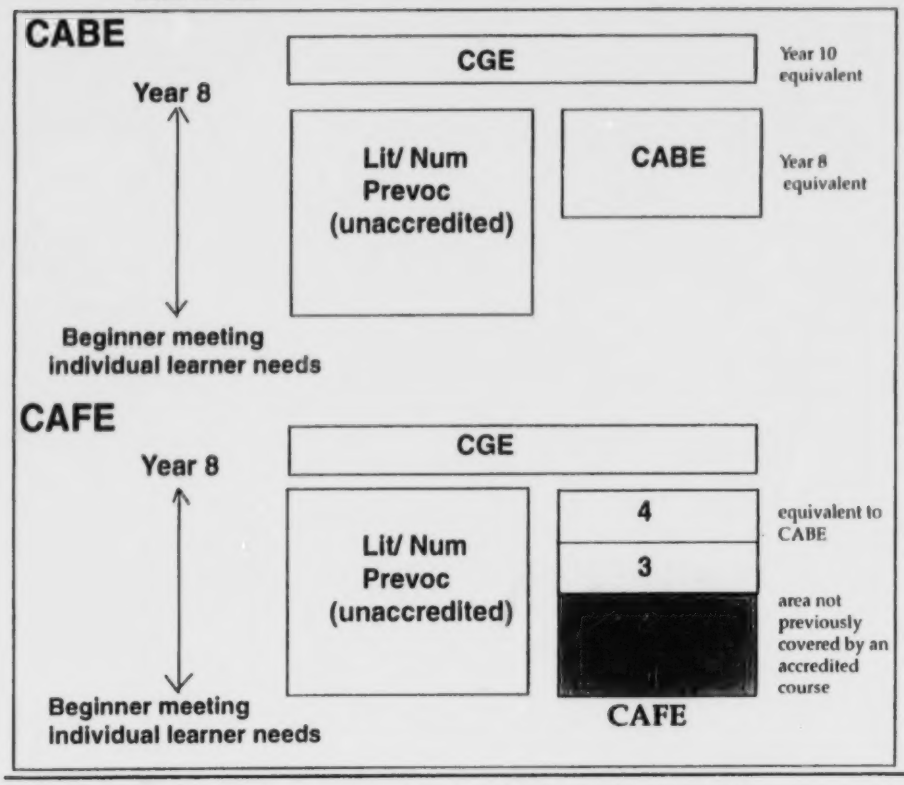
The shift from free access and social equity to economic rationalism suggests a move away from an ABE world that was apparently unproblematic. While there was much to commend free access and social equity, issues such as a welfare approach to literacy provision were starting to be questioned. These and other complexities and inconsistencies existed, as Lee & Wickert point out in their article, *Deconstructing Adult Literacy Teaching* (1994 b). While former provision reflected the 'primacy of the individual', the role of the teacher was not made explicit. Teachers' roles were formerly seen as that of passive agents of the learner's needs rather than having an active role as teachers offering expert knowledge. In this learner/teacher dynamic, the social difference between them was blurred and generally not recognised.

Another related issue revealing the complexities of past ABE provision concerned content and pedagogy. If 'the individual student's perceptions, needs, aspirations, and learning style should determine the type of tuition

s/he receives rather than any preconceived notions of ideal educational content and delivery' (ALIO, 1983, in Lee and Wickert 1994b), then *what* and *how* to teach remained problematic. In relation to this, McCormack argued as well that 'a key issue facing ALBE is to begin defining some substantive modes of knowledge needed by contemporary adults' (1994, p 20). In addition, subjective assessment practices have not lent themselves to adequate accountability.

Some of the findings of this research project demonstrate positive new outcomes of recent ABE provision, ie CAFE. While some findings support the notion that there was much that was valuable and needed to be preserved (such as addressing individual learner needs and diversity of provision, which there has been an attempt to incorporate in a new competency- based curriculum) there were also things that needed to be done better. Not least, CAFE has begun to address the assessment issues of past provision that have not lent themselves to adequate accountability (see p 10) as well as providing full-time study and formalised learner pathways for ABE learners (see p 13).

Figure 1: Relationship between CAFE, CABE, *Lit/Num Prevoc* and CGE



2. FRAMING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Preamble

The development of CAFE was influenced by the implementation of key aspects of the NTRA, while at the same time being 'more heavily influenced by learner needs' (Project Manager). The reasons for both the development of CAFE and the influence of the NTRA have been explained in Chapter 1.

This chapter explores some issues that emerge at the intersection of national training reform and the CAFE curriculum, and that have implications for ABE learners at the lower levels. These issues are the concern of this research project. For CAFE to gain accreditation, it was necessary that it meet the accreditation requirements of the national training reform agenda, and as a result was influenced by it. Its structures are written in competency-based terms to meet the requirements of TAFE NSW. The issues that emerge are explored by drawing on the debate that has surrounded them and which are relevant for both the group of learners that are the subject of this research project, and for the teachers delivering programs to them.

The key issues of concern here are:

1. The change to the focus of education and training as a result of the NTRA
2. The response of the literacy field to the national training agenda
3. Reasons CAFE meets national training agenda requirements
4. How NFROT shaped the CAFE curriculum
5. How policy changes have impacted on teacher practices
6. How learners are positioned by the structures of NFROT.

The change to the focus of education and training as a result of the NTRA

The NTRA is a collection of government policies directed to reform the Australian approach to skills formation in response to the globalising economy. It was developed by a Labor government, with the agreement of industry and unions, and with the involvement of training providers. It aimed to increase and improve the quality of training, offer flexibility and national consistency of training, improve access to disadvantaged groups and reform arrangements for recognition of overseas training. The role of

government was justified on both social and economic grounds (Allen Consulting 1994, p i).

On economic grounds, the Hawke/Keating government's main objective for training reform was the establishment of a strong and unified approach to training in all sectors, and in public and private provision, with the implementation of reforms focused on the demand side (Allen Consulting, p iii). Dawkins, the then Federal Minister for the newly created Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in 1987, in *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins & Holding 1987) outlines the major government policy of micro-economic reform, with the focus on education having an integral contribution to offer to the 'clever country' (Black 1995, p 32).

Allen Consulting in its review of *The Implementation of the National Training Agenda for ANTA* (1994, piii) explains the government's position:

> Governments ... seek to influence skill formation on economic grounds since the ability to adapt and learn new skills is an important ingredient in national economic performance.

The report explains: 'The development of a deep, diverse and dynamic national skill pool should be a major *economic* justification for a government role in training' (p ii).

On social grounds, Allen Consulting (p i), presents the government's position:

> Along with general education, vocational education and training contributes to an informed society with shared values. However, the major social objectives it serves are to achieve equity in entry level training, broadly defined to encompass all groups in the workforce and older workers as well as youth, and of course to assist the unemployed.

The Allen Report specifies the requirement for entry-level training (1994, p6):

> A major role ... for government in *entry level training* is widely accepted, and we believe justified, essentially on equity (equal opportunity) grounds. We think that the concept of 'entry level training' should extend to training including foundation learning for base grade workers throughout the workforce regardless of age.

The economic justification for training reform has been the subject of much debate and criticism in the education and training sector, so does not need to be explored again here. However, it does provide a base line for the discussion of CAFE that follows.

Although there is no clear statement of overall strategy, there are generally agreed to be eight elements which are identified in the review, *Implementing the Australian Training System*.

In summary form, the eight elements are (Allen Consulting 1994, pp 18, 19):

- competency based training (CBT)
- competency standards
- national recognition of training
- curriculum, delivery and assessment
- entry-level training
- the training market
- access and equity
- funding for training

Although these elements all have relevance for the CAFE curriculum in various ways, only some of them have a direct impact on the learners who are the subject of this research. CBT, competency standards, national recognition of training, curriculum development and assessment, and access and equity are relevant. They informed the writing of CAFE, in order to respond to guidelines and meet curriculum accreditation. The course also needed to be a product that would be competitive in the training market (Black 1992, p 16), particularly under the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (DEET 1991a) initiative of Special Intervention Program (SIP), designed to provide training to the long-term unemployed (Black 1995, p 65).

In NSW, TAFE has gone down the CBT path in its implementation of the national training agenda. This has resulted in all new TAFE courses, including CAFE, being written in competency-based terms, with units of study called 'modules', and outcomes expressed as competence standards and called 'learning outcomes'. In TAFE NSW, CBT has resulted in the imposition of structures such as learner levels, learner pathways, assessment of module purpose, certification at the end of the course, and portability of the credential to other courses and colleges. The call for accountability is related to assessment, and is the key to funding CBT courses.

The response of the literacy field to the NTRA

The literacy field has responded vigorously to the issue of literacy and language changes as the locus of control move from the literacy practitioners, to control by the government. Many in the field have been left with the impression that its only role is to implement government policy, with little opportunity to influence it. Some responses express deep opposition. A major concern centres on the use of competencies in literacy curricula with

the attendant possibility of narrowing literacy acquisition to the gaining of discrete skills (Auerbach 1994 and Shilton 1994), the acquisition of which does not ensure learners will be 'literate' according to the ALLP's definition of literacy as 'the ability to read and use written information and write appropriately in a range of contexts' (DEET 1991b). Another concern focuses on the narrowness of the Federal Government's economic interests, limiting the provision of literacy education to outcomes that fit its agenda (Shilton 1994, p 23). Deep suspicion of the government statements of reform, including ideas of social justice and access and equity, are expressed by Anderson (1995 p 24).

While there are major concerns and deep suspicions of the government agendas, some of those in the literacy field do not reject government initiatives. They recognise the importance of the economic shift in the ways the government perceives adult literacy, and they see the risk for groups of learners in need of a literacy provision that is not directly employment related and the possibility of their marginalisation.

Lo Bianco (1987) perceived the changes that were approaching and argued the case for their acceptance. He recognised that personal empowerment was no longer enough justification for claiming public resources and that literacy must be presented as indispensable on economic grounds as well as social grounds (Lo Bianco in Black 1995, pp 29, 30). Coates, in her explanation of the policy context for the National Framework (1993), reinforced this acceptance in her rationale, outlining the need for some evidence of the responsible use of public funds — evidence that was not available from the individualised reporting methods that existed in literacy programs.

Wickert (1991) stressed the need for teachers to make sense of the politics, and to reflect on their impact on curricula and teaching practice if they were to maintain some control over the political agenda. She expressed concern that the advocates of the field of adult literacy may 'be becoming part of a process of legitimating government action, seeing the broader economic corporatist government agenda and risking the independence, the "critical space" of a professional voice' (Wickert 1991, p 43). Black, in his report *Ensuring Quality ABE Provision* (1992), indicated the need for the field to be part of the restructuring, or else be disadvantaged (p 17), though he warned of the risk of being dominated by industry and losing sight of some long-held principles and equity-based origins of many literacy programs (p 19). However, many voices from the literacy and language fields exhorted providers to seize the initiative, reclaim the field and not be dictated to by government agendas. These concerns were reflected in the CAFE curriculum that emerged and in the roles and responsibilities of teachers in its implementation.

Reasons CAFE meets NTRA requirements

The NTRA affected all education and training in the VET area. The literacy field has been required by government fiat to respond by writing courses to meet the national training requirements, which are specified in The National Framework for Recognition of Training (NFROT) (Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee, 1992). This requirement caused the tension earlier described between traditional literacy provision and the training reform demands. The literacy field, together with the English language teaching field, was required to adopt the elements of the NTRA. These were seen as integral to the 'skilling' of Australia, with the NTRA 'focussed on the importance of English language, literacy and numeracy training as a major part of an overall strategy to improve the general skill level of the Australian workforce' (Coates 1993, p 65). Without meeting the requirements of NFROT in curricula, literacy teaching would probably have been relegated to the margins of education without access to significant public funding (Black 1992, p 19). As well, many literacy programs were reconstituted as labour market programs to meet national training demands, moving the literacy field centre stage, and resulting in an enormous growth in funding for literacy programs as labour market programs were cast as the Labor Government's solution to long-term unemployment. This was the situation in TAFE NSW when CAFE needed to be written.

The fact that the introduction of CAFE provided an accredited course for learners at the entry level of literacy provision is not just a result of the national training agenda and its focus on national skill formation, but rather the result of a deliberate attempt to broaden opportunities for these learners by offering them the possibility of full-time study, including more choices in the form of electives, and opening pathways to technical education as well as general education with the possibility of Austudy or Abstudy.

How NFROT shaped the CAFE curriculum

The *National Accreditation Framework for English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence*, known as the National Framework (ACTRAC 1993) was written as a response from the literacy and language fields to NFROT, and after the government's insistence on greater accountability in the use of public funds. It was designed to provide a reference point to enable provision to conform with NFROT requirements (Coates 1993). Coates accepts the placement of literacy and language within the national training agenda, saying (1993, pp 65, 66):

> Accreditation needs to occur so that language and numeracy can be fully recognised as a key component of training reform. Accreditation and articulation of courses are essential for individuals to ensure recognition for training needed for career progression and further study.

However, Coates also warned against attempts by government to simplify the complexities of the work of literacy practitioners to a base level (1993, p 64). She felt that the National Framework provided the government with a way of understanding these complexities which had not been evident in the individual focus of the ALAN Scales (Griffin & Forwood, 1991), an earlier attempt to develop a national reporting rating scale. Educators were concerned to protect the opportunities that curriculum frameworks offer, and link student learning outcomes to curriculum outcomes and not just decontextualised lists of competencies. This was partly achieved by the introduction of the Interim Literacy Course Matrix (ILCM) (DEET 1992). The National Framework, and the application of the National Framework for ABE (1993b), strongly influenced the writing of CAFE (CAFE Manual, Vol 1, Section 1, Part D, p 49). The Project Manager for the writing of CAFE (hereafter referred to as the Project Manager) said, however (interview, October 1996):

> The National Framework let us down badly. There were delays in formalisation. It failed to provide the level of detail that we had expected ... It was an overarching document [designed] to inform curriculum ... the descriptions of levels were very broad. We were required to develop a course within the National Framework in order to address agreed standards, yet there were very few guidelines.

He added:

> This course [CAFE] was one of the first to be based on the framework, which was at this time highly theoretical. Because we had the best qualified teachers in the country who were experienced and probably the most professionally developed, and who were used to developing individualised programs, we needed to develop a state framework which would provide space for this experience and skill within a CBT format.

The new requirements for the writing of the CAFE course in CBT could have been seen as restrictive. Some academics, such as Seddon (1994), suggested at the time that CBT was sufficiently flexible to write curriculum in ways that would not disadvantage learners or compromise underpinning literacy learning principles. Seddon suggested that ABE could take advantage of the inherent contradictions in the new education and training environment. She described the situation where: 'Outcomes-based curriculum frameworks are

being used to legitimate practical pedagogy which would not otherwise get formal support or funding'. The flexibility of the frameworks were used in the writing of CAFE. The Project Manager said: 'In many ways CAFE is a curriculum framework'. He added: 'We found CBT was flexible and we used it that way'. The curriculum that resulted deliberately leaves room for teachers to be able to elicit the things they need to teach in meeting students' needs. This was not the case in some of the earlier courses written in CBT, such as the first version of *Certificate in General Adult Education* (CGEA 1) (Adult Community and Further Education Board 1993) and the *Certificate of Spoken and Written English* (CSWF) (Hagal et al 1993), which adopted a lock-step approach. These courses have recently been evaluated and have been found to have a narrowing effect on teaching (Sanguinetti 1994, Bottomley, Dalton & Corbel, 1994). The CAFE curriculum designers had rejected these courses as models for CAFE. However, they had no option but to comply with NFROT. NFROT carries with it some non-negotiable features, such as modularised learning units, assessment of outcomes, pathways, accountability and portability. It is important to note that some of these features were also present in previous accreditation arrangements, implemented in CABE. For all the flexibility that has been incorporated in the CAFE course, questions still remain about the effects of the non-negotiable aspects of competency- based curriculum and the non-negotiable features of accredited courses generally, on learners at the entry level of literacy provision.

How policy changes have impacted on teacher practices

The Project Manager expressed frustration with the way teachers had interpreted and implemented CAFE. He maintained that:

> In spite of extensive professional development, one of the things we weren't prepared for was practitioner myopia. Teachers saw their own circumstances as paramount and they failed to acknowledge the diversity of students which one course had to cover.

Another thing he was not prepared for was what he called:

> The literalists, especially re-integration [of literacy and numeracy]. They felt they had to integrate literacy with numeracy even though the course is contextualised according to students' needs and if those needs do not require an integration of numeracy and literacy it should not be thrust on them. There are many contexts where literacy and numeracy cannot be reasonably integrated. There were also some teachers who demanded to be told what to do in the classroom despite twenty years

of individualised curriculum development by ABE teachers. The detailed 'what' is embodied in the Units of Work which are the teacher resource materials for the curriculum.

The awareness teachers have of the politics of their field has implications for the ways they read the curriculum, and can help them use their professional judgment and find spaces to implement curriculum to the advantage of their students. McKenna (1994) points out that curriculum is inevitably influenced by policy, funding and accreditation processes and it is important that teachers understand policy issues and their impact on the classroom. Moore's (1996) belief that CBT results in a profession relegated to the role of regulated implementation should be contested. Ball (1993) cited in Wickert (1995) discusses the notion that the teachers have an interpretative role in policy implementation. He suggests that policy makers, curriculum writers and teachers all contribute to the delivery of policy in varying ways. Ball describes different contexts in the process of developing education policy. The first is the *context of influence*, where politicians develop policy; the second is the *context of policy text production* where the policy is converted into a text that presents the policy (curriculum documents) to the user (teacher) and the third is the *context of practice*, where the policy is interpreted. At the point of *context of practice*, teachers do not simply implement policy. They interpret and reinterpret the policy, recreate it and adapt it. Ball argues that policy makers cannot control the meaning of their texts, multiple readings are possible and all policy contains ambiguities, contradictions and omissions that provide 'space' for manoeuvre. Wickert (1995) explores the notion that competence statements and their implementation have multiple functions, which vary according to who is using them. For example, a teacher working in a specific site needs a competence statement that fits this site. On the other hand, the Project Manager writes a competence statement that must find what is common across a range of sites. This is precisely the frustration expressed by the Project Manager in the comments quoted above, and also expressed by teachers as they try to implement a curriculum that offers little more than a framework for them to use in their specific site.

The responses to the curriculum by participating teachers ranged widely, from a positive embrace of the new curriculum to outright rejection. Those who have looked for multiple readings appear to have been much better able to cope with the implementation. Many teachers have taken a negative stance towards the economic rationale of the training reform agenda, and in so doing failed to see, let alone take advantage of the equity perspectives it offers. Those who resist or are uncomfortable with notions of CBT have difficulty reading the document creatively. Many identified a conflict between their philosophy of ABE provision and CBT in CAFE, particularly in

regard to being able to meet the specific needs of all learners. Many of the teachers who participated in this research reported difficulties reading the curriculum documents. Many found the language alienating. This, together with its sheer size, makes the information it contains difficult to access.

Some made unfavourable comparisons to the CABE curriculum, which was seen as offering teachers much more support. The Project Manager rejected the notion of CAFE being a repeat of CABE, claiming that CABE was really a *content*- based course, unlike CAFE which is *learner*- based. Teachers had expected more support, and were disappointed by its absence from the CAFE document. Teachers who did not have considerable confidence, or who were new to the field, were found to have difficulty 'reading between the lines', and many, in spite of extensive professional development, do not know they have permission to read other than literally. McCormack (1994) challenges the non-content curriculum and calls for the establishment of curriculum content in ALBE. He says 'the current obsession with competencies has made it even more difficult to talk about ideas as content' (p 21). He sees the introduction of content as important to strengthen practitioners.

How learners are positioned by the structures of NFROT

Learners in CAFE at the entry point of literacy and numeracy acquisition are the group directly caught in the crossfire between traditional ABE provision and the NTRA, and the requirements to meet NFROT. This survey has found that the shift to CBT as incorporated in CAFE at F and S stages suits many students, but there are many who do not benefit from the changes to an accredited course.

Issues of staged learning, formal assessment and certification were not previously part of the learning experience for this group of learners in NSW, who have traditionally been able to study in courses that are not accredited, which is where some teachers perceive that the needs of some learners are better served. New issues continue to surface for these learners as TAFE redefines its structures. One is the recent release by TAFE of selection criteria for CAFE (FSTD 1996), which for the first time carry the possibility of exclusion of some students on the grounds of lack of any previous education.

The Australian Council of Adult Literacy supports the maintenance of diversity in its statement of informing principles (ACAL 1989) for ABE provision for Australian adults, stating learners have 'the right of equal opportunity to meet their individual ongoing needs in adult literacy and basic education programs' and 'a right of access to appropriate programs free

of charge'. Many believe these to be underpinning principles of literacy provision (Lee & Wickert 1994a).

How and where these principles are implemented for learners who are not appropriately placed in CAFE is an issue for debate. Not all people with literacy learning needs will be best served by TAFE provision and there may be situations when TAFE is not the right place or the right time for some learners, and as Seddon said, 'The field must be clear about what should be preserved in ALBE, what is non-negotiable, but must also be hard-headed about what is dispensable' (1994, p 9). However TAFE continues to have a vital role to meet the literacy learning needs of people outside CAFE and for whom CAFE is, for whatever reason, not an appropriate choice. Further reasons for this importance are discussing in the *Findings of the Research* (see Chapter 6). The NTRA has social as well as economic objectives and can be called upon to meet them, by continuing to provide appropriate programs to meet the access needs of learners in TAFE who are not well served by CAFE.

Flexibility has been a valued characteristic of ABE provision. There are concerns that adhering to economic agendas will limit this flexibility. Without diversity of provision within TAFE, flexibility to meet all learners' needs will be lost. ABE tuition needs to continue to be responsive to learners' needs, and carry forward its history of innovation. 'Varied provision has always been a basic principle underpinning ABE and it features in all the good practice documents' (Black 1992, p 31). Black warned, however, of the need for 'some balance between "flexibility" within varied provision and the attainment of set quality standards' (p 31).

Many argue that the maintenance of a variety of literacy courses within TAFE is needed to prevent the emergence of a poorly funded and marginalised second-class provision for lower-level learners outside institutional settings. Black (1992) warns that if we establish two classes of ABE, one accredited and one unaccredited, a gulf will open as the accredited courses attract funding. Sanguinetti (1994, p 10) is concerned that the effect of tying funding to outcomes will lead to a shift in focus and this also raises concerns about lower-level learners missing out.

Conclusion

If the implementation of training reform in ABE has the effect of reducing the flexibility that is a characteristic of literacy provision over its history, then it is likely that the introduction of an ABE course written to meet the requirements of NFROT will have the most impact on learners in the lower

levels of CAFE, who need this flexibility in their provision, and who have not previously been enrolled in accredited courses. These learners are caught up in the changes brought about as a result of implementing such a curriculum, and affected by the interaction of policy changes, and teachers' responses to them.

Many of these students may benefit from the opportunities CAFE offers with the introduction of learner pathways, broader learning opportunities, access to vocational courses, official recognition of their learning and the focusing nature of an accredited course. However, this intersection of CBT and ABE does not work for all learners, or for all teachers, thus creating the challenges that teachers are facing.

This research project examined the effect of the structures of accreditation for the target group of learners by talking to the teachers who are interpreting and implementing the curriculum. All the teachers that participated in the survey shared two characteristics. Firstly, they all showed deep concern about their learners and a sincere desire to do the best they could for them, with thoughtfulness in their approach to their work. Secondly, they all expressed the desire for TAFE NSW to maintain an alternative ABE provision in addition to CAFE.

The teachers displayed a wide variety of notions about CBT and attitudes to it. Their various 'readings' of CAFE have influenced the way they interpret and implement it, and so implementation varies from site to site, as teachers find and use the 'spaces' it provides in different ways. Added to this is the variety of communities across NSW and diversity of student populations, ensuring that each time CAFE is implemented it is unique.

The curriculum has been written in a way to meet TAFE accreditation requirements with the attendant structures, while at the same time attempting to safeguard ABE principles within the document. This has meant the deliberate inclusion of spaces for multiple readings and flexibility, but it has also meant that the document is different to any previous ABE curriculum, and as a result for some it is alienating and cumbersome, and non-directive. Teachers have responded to this in many ways, some embracing the freedom it offers, others not knowing how to use it.

This research examined the implications of implementing CAFE at F and S stages for students through the experiences of their teachers as they have worked to implement this curriculum.

3. DESCRIPTION OF CAFE

This course description provides a context for the rest of this report, particularly the research findings, which are referenced to this chapter as necessary.

General description

CAFE is a course written in competency-based terminology. It is designed for learners with literacy and numeracy learning needs, from beginning literacy and/or numeracy acquisition through to entry into courses such as the NSW *Certificate of General Education* (CGE). The course was informed by the National Framework and equates with the *National Qualifications Framework Certificate* Level 1.

Course aim

'CAFE aims to provide students with increased access to the vocational education and training system, to work and to increased participation in society' (CAFE Manual 1994, Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 5).

Course content

CAFE is made up of *core modules* and *electives*.

The core modules are based on three context areas: personal and social activity, further education and training, and work. Students choose the contexts that suit their goals. The contexts are reflected in the module names:

> Numeracy and Literacy for Personal and Social Activity
> Numeracy and Literacy for Further Education and Training
> Numeracy and Literacy for Work and Work Preparation.

The *core* modules are supported by nnits of work, which provide some teaching strategies and optional suggestions for content and assessment at the four learner levels (see below for details about learner levels), with titles such as Electricity Accounts, Buying a Car, Families, Federal Government, Maths for Eating. Teachers negotiate the selection of units of work with students, according to students needs and interests. Suggestions for content are also contained in the annotated index (Volume 6). Teaching approaches

for CAFE are modelled through the exemplar unit of work, Electricity Accounts (Vol 1, Section 1, Part C, pp 32, 34).

Elective modules can be either *General* elective modules, such as Aboriginal Studies, Environmental Issues, Media Studies, Learning by Contract, or *Technical* elective modules, which are accredited modules from a wide range of TAFE courses drawn from all Industry Training Divisions, eg Tourism and Hospitality, Office Skills or Rural and Mining. These have been specially selected as appropriate for CAFE students and accredited within CAFE, though questions remain about the appropriacy of all these technical electives for F and S stages of CAFE. The electives are designed to support the literacy and numeracy teaching in the core modules.

Numeracy and Literacy coexist in the *core* modules, as shown in the *core* module titles. This coexistence is interpreted by many practitioners to be the integration of literacy and numeracy teaching. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the curriculum provides no mechanism for awarding students results that separate literacy performance from numeracy performance. However, little information is given about implementing the integration of literacy and numeracy in the CAFE Manual, although literacy and numeracy activities are suggested in the exemplar unit of work, Electricity Accounts, with activities at F, S, T and D stages. The units of work in Vol 6 of the CAFE Manual also provide suggested contexts for literacy and numeracy activities.

Stages of CAFE

CAFE has four learner levels which are known as *stages* in CAFE and are called F, S, T and D, and equate with levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. F is the lowest level and D is the course completion level. One of the difficulties for teachers implementing CAFE is defining the criteria for entry or achievement of each level. The Course Manual offers this differentiation: 'As modules develop from F through to D, the conditions under which learning and assessment are to take place reflect increasingly complex activities and less familiar contexts' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part B, p 28).

Additional information is provided in a table, *Indicators for initial student placement in appropriate CAFE stage*, to assist teachers with placement of students in stages. The distinctions it offers between levels in literacy and numeracy skills are very general:

Stage 1: Students do not need to demonstrate numeracy/literacy competence for entry at this stage.

Stage 2: Can perform relatively simple tasks with mainly familiar content .

Stage 3: Can perform relatively simple tasks with a range of familiar and some unfamiliar content.

Stage 4: Can perform relatively simple tasks with familiar and unfamiliar content (Vol 1, Section 2, part D, p7).

These are referenced to the National Framework and Mayer Key Competencies.

In practice, one way a distinction in stages is realised is by a shift in teaching ratio. F and S stages have a 15:2 teacher/learner ratio (Vol 2, Section 1, p 3, Vol 3, Section 1, p 3) and T and D stages have a 15:1 ratio (Vol 4, Section 1, p 3, Vol 5, Section 1, p 3).

Module purpose and learning outcomes

Each *core* module has three module purposes, which are the same for all *core* modules. These are (Vol 2, Section 1, p 2):

> To provide students with the skills and strategies to perform effectively:
>
> - as developing learners
> - using numeracy and literacy
> - with affective competence.

In F and S stages, these module purposes can all be assisted. In T and D stages, the module purpose, 'using numeracy and literacy' must be achieved independently, though the others can be achieved with assistance.

There are 15 learning outcomes for the three *core* modules of each level, which are the same for each level of the course. The learning outcomes are in three groups, as follows:

- learning outcomes 1-5 relate to the module purpose 'developing as learners'.
- learning outcomes 6-12 relate to the module purpose 'developing literacy and numeracy'.
- learning outcomes 13-15 relate to the module purpose 'developing affective outcomes'.

Assessment

Assessment is continuous, and is locally set and marked with Pass/Fail. Assessment is to enable students to demonstrate they have achieved the module purposes (as above). Assessment is not of each individual learning outcome, but is focused on the module purpose. Students can be assessed individually or in groups. Assessment is by teacher observation and documentation, negotiated tasks and/or student portfolio. 'Self-assessment is considered an essential facet of the monitoring of progress in any adult basic education setting' (Vol 1, Section 2, Part D, p 16) and is strongly encouraged in the CAFE Manual.

Assessment of technical modules is carried out according to the guidelines of the Industrial Training Division which sponsors the particular technical module.

Certification

To gain the CAFE certificate, students must complete the *core* module, Numeracy and Literacy for Personal and Social Activity and one or both of the other *core* modules at D stage, plus successful completion of at least 144 hours of general and/or technical electives. The electives can be completed over the entire period of study. This means that a student who enters CAFE at F, S or T stage has the option of studying electives at this time, or later in the course.

Statements of Attainment (described below) at F, S and T stages are available on successful completion of the compulsory *core* module plus at least one other *core* module at the relevant level, and successful completion of at least 36 hours of general and/or technical electives.

Study patterns

CAFE can be studied full-time (usually, though not necessarily, 20 hours per week) or part time. Students can spend between 180 and 216 hours on the *core* modules for each level if this is necessary to meet their needs. They can study up to 144 hours of electives at each level. The course is flexible, with multiple entry and exit points, depending on the individual student's competence and achievement of personal goals and learning styles.

Articulation

'The course is designed to articulate with further general education courses such as the NSW *Certificate in General Education* and a range of vocational education and training courses' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part B, p 29), although students seeking entry to other courses must meet the selection criteria for that course. The curriculum maps standard pathways from CAFE (Vol 1, Section 1, Part B, p 30).

Pedagogical approach

A teaching/learning spiral is recommended for the course which involves four stages: planning and goal setting; immersion and modelling; action; reflection. This cycle is drawn from several pedagogical sources. Suggestions for teacher implementation and student involvement are given.

Statements of Attainment in Adult Foundation Education (SAAFE)

Three *Statements of Attainment in Adult Foundation Education* courses have been accredited. They sit within the CAFE and correspond to exit at F, S or T stages. SAAFE is intended for students who have enrolled in CAFE, but who cannot or do not want to complete to certificate level. This means a student can exit at any level of the course with a credential. The core and elective module choices are the same as at the equivalent level of CAFE (NSW TAFE *Statements of Attainment in Adult foundation Education*, 1995).

The CAFE Manual

The manual for CAFE is a six-volume document. Volumes 2-5 provide syllabuses for the four levels of CAFE. Each of these volumes is the complete syllabus for each stage of CAFE, representing a possible four semesters of study.

The manual also includes teaching resources and guidelines for planning, delivery and evaluation of the course. Volume 1 contains the course syllabus and implementation guidelines. Volume 6 is the teacher resource material, containing units of work and the adult basic education annotated index. The annotated index 'is a series of literacy/numeracy topics with key teaching points and strategies, guiding principles and salient issues arising for each topic' (CAFE Manual, 1994, Introduction). The document is written in the language of CBT.

Literacy and Numeracy Pre-vocational

In order to understand the implications for learners of implementing CAFE, it is useful to provide a brief description of the course *Literacy and Numeracy Pre-vocational* (*Lit/Num Prevoc*), presently operating in NSW TAFE colleges as part of ABE provision. Descriptions of parts of this course can be found in the collection of materials called the ABE Handbook (NSW TAFE, undated). This is a part-time course consisting of three subjects. Two of the subjects are *Reading and Writing for Adults* and *Maths Workshop*, usually entailing up to six hours study per week for each subject. The teaching ratio is 6:1, with flexible entry and exit points. There are no formal educational entry requirements and no prescribed assessment. The course is:

> Designed to cater for students' individual learning needs, rates of learning, interests and learning styles. In consultation with the teacher, the students formulate their own goals and their literacy [and numeracy] programs. The programs vary from student to student, encompassing both group and individual activities (NSW TAFE, ABE Handbook).

The course is unaccredited, but is designed to provide access and entry for learners, as well as a pathway to other courses in TAFE such as CAFE, *Women and Work* (WOW), or CGE (TAFE Handbook, 1996).

Literacy and Numeracy Pre-vocational offers a third subject, *Literacy Assistance with a Volunteer Tutor.* This subject offers individual tuition with a volunteer tutor, supervised by an adult basic education teacher who is usually an Adult Literacy Officer. Tuition is on a flexible basis, negotiated between the student, tutor and teacher.

4 METHODOLOGY

Rationale for techniques selected

The research was conducted using a variety of data collection methods. These were:

1. use of TAFE student records
2. questionnaires
3. interviews with teachers
4. elite interviews.

This research was undertaken as an investigation into the social practice of education, which suggested a critical approach. By examining how learners are positioned by the implementation of CAFE, it was intended to keep them central to the debate about literacy provision in the current climate of CBT. Researchers, such as Lee (1992) and Lather (1991) stress the usefulness of an approach that attempts to work with methods which deconstruct the texts of education. This approach was used to allow the learners to remain the focus of this work. The research investigated, through the voices of teachers, how the curriculum positions the learner in the structures of CAFE. Lather (1991, p 69) calls for a collaborative approach to critical inquiry if the research is to be empowering for the researched, and the data is to be credible. Baynham (1990, pp 28-29) calls for research that includes 'insider perspectives'. He suggests that research partnerships should be developed between academic researchers and practitioners. This was the approach taken in this research. As a CAFE coordinator and teacher, I had an 'insider's' understanding of the field being researched, which allowed collaboration between the researcher and the researched. This proved invaluable in data collection as interviewees responded openly and willingly, knowing that I understood the issues they discussed. The research partnership extended to the writing of the findings, with interviewees being fully consulted about the representation of the data they had provided.

CAFE coordinators were chosen as the principal source of data for this research. The CAFE Manual states that coordinators 'should be from the adult basic education section and must teach on the CAFE, preferably the core modules' (CAFE Manual, Vol 1, Section 2, Part A, p 4). It is coordinators and teachers who mediate between the student and the curriculum at the point which Ball (1993) describes as *context of practice*. CAFE teachers are in the best position to articulate student perspectives because they access both

the curriculum and the students' practice. An interview was also conducted with the CAFE curriculum development Project Manager at the point Ball describes as the *context of policy text production* which enabled interpretation and explanation of the curriculum documents, thus providing a reference point for analysis of data collected from teachers.

The aim to keep the learner at the centre of the research suggested a qualitative approach. However, as Cherryholmes (1988) points out, both quantitative and qualitative approaches to education research have a contribution to make if the research is to have validity, and both these approaches were used here to conduct research that was appropriate for t' research site. The use of multiple data sources provides validity through triangulation. Lather (1991, p 68) argues this is necessary for validity in research into the social practice of education. The aim was to present a valid picture of the learner in CAFE in this way.

Use of TAFE student records

Purpose

Access to TAFE Student Information System (SIS) provided statistical enrolment and results data which allowed examination of patterns in enrolments and results in TAFE records. These patterns informed later data collection. SIS data also provided a list of colleges where students were enrolled in CAFE at the F and S stages. This provided a starting point for the research data collection.

Procedure

Data related to the *core modules* in CAFE was obtained as follows:

1. The number of students enrolled in each core module in 1995 and 1996
2. The results obtained by students in the core modules in 1995 and 1996 (end of semester 1).

For a description of core modules see Chapter 3, pp 29, 30.

Data from SIS

During 1995 (the first year CAFE was implemented) and 1996, 74 TAFE colleges had students enrolled at F and/or S stages. By examining student results recorded on SIS, a pattern of result codes used was charted and implications drawn from them that influenced the design of the

questionnaire. Numbers of students enrolled in CAFE in different colleges were also compared. The data demonstrated an enormous variation in CAFE enrolments and results from college to college, confirming that CAFE covers a wide variety of learning environments and student populations. Instances of very low enrolment numbers (less than class size) suggested the need for further exploration, which was undertaken.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were circulated to the 74 colleges in NSW in which any students were enrolled in CAFE at F and/or S stages.

Purpose

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather preliminary data about the implementation of CAFE at F and S stages and to inform the design of interview questions to be conducted with CAFE coordinators. An additional purpose of the questionnaire was to gather data to select appropriate sites for in-depth interviews.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed to gather relevant data in a way which facilitated ease of teacher response. It was short, with closed questions not requiring recourse to teachers' records, so that it could be completed and returned in one operation. The questionnaire included space for teacher comments, and an expression of interest for further involvement in the research. Thirty eight of the 74 questionnaires were completed and returned, and of these, 21 teachers expressed interest in further involvement in the research. Most responses included thoughtful comment throughout the questionnaire, often with evidence of consultation between several teachers. This, together with the high number of teachers willing to participate further in the project, demonstrated that teachers were concerned about learners in CAFE and wanted to talk about the issues being explored.

The questionnaires provided both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data[1], in the form of closed questions, was separated into four sections to provide the following information:

1. College name and size of ABE section, to provide information to assist in making a representative selection of colleges for in-depth interviews.

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1 Data: construed as singular throughout (*Macquarie Dictionary*)

2. Student enrolment and assessment information to establish patterns of provision of CAFE at F and S stages within a college, patterns of results and alternative ways of dealing with results, patterns of pathways learners follow and time students need to complete their study.
3. Comparisons between CAFE F and S stages and *Lit/Num Prevoc.*
4. Pedagogical issues, and ways implementation of CAFE impacted on underpinning principles of ABE and teaching practice.

Respondents were invited to add qualitative data at the end of the questionnaire. In fact, as well as doing this, most respondents included comments throughout the survey.

Data collected

The data collected from the 38 returned questionnaires informed the design of interview questions. Because teachers included much rich qualitative data, questionnaire data was additionally used to support interview findings, as seen in Chapter 6.

The qualitative data was summarised as follows: student progress and pace through the course, learner outcomes and pathways, assessment methods and results, and individual learner needs. Where appropriate, new issues that arose were incorporated inthe design of the interview questions.

College selection

It was important that the colleges selected would give a fair representation of CAFE experience across NSW. The sample chosen followed the suggestion of the Adult Literacy Information Office (ALIO) as being one they would consider valid (telephone conversation, June 1996). Of the 21 respondents who expressed interest in further involvement in the research, only four were needed. To select colleges, some criteria were established: colleges would vary in size, geographic location and style of provision of CAFE, and colleges should have sufficient experience of CAFE at F and S stages to have posted results. It was important to select colleges where teachers had made relevant comments about the issues being researched, expressing a range of experiences and opinions about CAFE. The final selection included a small country college, a college in a large urban centre away from Sydney, a college on the rural fringe of Sydney and one large Sydney suburban college. Two of these expressed strong positive responses to CAFE at F and S stages and two provided thoughtful comments about the difficulties they were experiencing. These colleges are described in Chapter 5.

Interviews with teachers

Purpose

In-depth interviews formed the heart of the research. Creswell (1994, p 145) discusses the assumptions of qualitative research design as being descriptive and concerned with process and meaning, and being interpretative and open. The qualitative methodology employed in this research was designed to provide a description of CAFE at F and S stages as it applies to students, through teachers sharing their experiences of working with students. By conducting interviews at four colleges chosen to represent the variety of implementation of CAFE within NSW, the aim was to provide a window on the CAFE experience, rather than conduct an objective course evaluation. It was important that the voices of individual teachers could be heard, rather than a summative conclusion drawn, if a picture of the diversity of the learners and their learning in CAFE was to emerge.

It was vital to keep student issues at the centre of the discussions and the questions were designed to do this.To achieve this, the preliminary data collected in the questionnaire responses was analysed in regard to teachers' experiences of student issues (as explained on p 37). The responses revealed some general patterns and also raised some new issues in relation to students in CAFE at F and S stages, which informed the question design.

Interview question design

The qualitative nature of the desired data led to the decision to use a semi-structured interview, with a series of open-ended questions, as described by Hamilton and Barton (1986, p 15). This allowed the interviewer's discretion to be used in the way questions were presented, to fit comfortably with each interview, while respecting how the participant framed and structured responses. Marshall and Rossman (1989, p 80) describe open questions as being fundamental to qualitative research, allowing issues to emerge which may not have been previously considered by the interviewer, while not allowing important points to be omitted. This approach was appropriate for this descriptive research.

The research questions are in four groups:

1. Background description of the local situation
2. Questions about overall implementation of CAFE at F and S stages
3. Questions about specific implementation issues
4. Teachers' reflections

Conduct of interviews

Data was collected in three of the four colleges by a single face-to-face informal interview. A telephone interview was conducted with the fourth college. The questions were supplied in advance. Other CAFE teachers, as well as the coordinator, were welcome to participate in each interview, and this was the case in all face-to-face interviews. Oakley (1981, p 41) suggests the best results in an interview are achieved when the relationships between the interviewer and interviewee are equal and the interviewer's identity is allowed to come through. The interviews were lively and frank, which was seen to be a result of the shared understanding of CAFE between the interviewer and interviewees.

Except for the telephone interview, interviews were taped and in all cases extensive notes were taken. Reflective recounts of each interview were written immediately afterwards.

Data analysis

In order to make sense of the data, the tape recordings were transcribed and rough notes were rewritten. Miles and Huberman (1994, p 56) argue that words are more meaningful than numbers and should not be converted into numbers, and recommend coding as a data retrieval system. From the data collected a coded card system was devised, from which patterns could be drawn. These patterns were categorised and cross-referenced to the CAFE curriculum and interview with the Project Manager (see Chapter 6). Relevant data from the questionnaires was integrated into the research findings at this point.

Elite interviews

Marshall and Rossman describe interviews that focus on interviewees with specialist knowledge in the area relevant to the research as 'elite interviews' (1989 p 83). Three interviews were conducted with ABE personnel with specialist knowledge relevant to this research.

Contextualising CAFE

Telephone interviews were conducted with one Project Manager from *Starting Points* and one from CABE. These interviews yielded data that contextualised CAFE. Open questions were used, designed to elicit information about the student needs, theoretical influences and political influences that shaped these courses, and which in turn shaped CAFE.

Design of CAFE

The third elite interview was conducted with the CAFE curriculum development Project Manager in a face-to-face interview. Again open questions were used, and were sent in advance. The questions were designed to provide a background to CAFE and link it to other ABE provision. They also were designed to investigate the ways policies were interpreted and applied to the design of CAFE, and the ways CAFE was designed to marry important ABE pedagogies and beliefs with TAFE policies. The data collected was used to provide an explication of course documents, thus providing a reference point for teachers' comments, as well as underpinning explanations of the background of CAFE and description of the course.

Table 1: Summary of methodology

Source of data	Type of data collected	Purpose of data	No of examples
TAFE Student Information System (SIS)	1. List of colleges with students enrolled in CAFE F and S 2. List of results of students students enrolled in CAFE F and S stages	1. Select colleges for questionnaire 2. Find patterns of results	74 colleges with students enrolled at F and S stages
Questionnaires circulated to all colleges with students enrolled in F and S stages	Quantitative and qualitative data about implementation of CAFE from all colleges with students enrolled in CAFE F and S stages	1. Provide overview of CAFE implementation 2. Select colleges for further research	74 circulated, 38 responses, 21 expressed interest in further involvement in project
Interviews with CAFE cordinators and teachers	Detailed qualitative data about implications for learners of implementing CAFE F and S stages	Provide core data for the research complemented by data from questionnaires	4 colleges to provide a valid representation of sites in NSW
Elite interviews	Qualitative data about: 1. ABE courses that preceeded CAFE 2. CAFE design	1. Provide a context for CAFE 2. Provide data about interpretation of policy in the design of CAFE	3 interviews with personnel

5. DESCRIPTIONS OF CAFE IN THE FOUR SELECTED COLLEGES

A picture of diversity

It was necessary to select colleges that would offer face validity in representing the diversity of CAFE provision across NSW. The course had been deliberately designed to cater for this diversity, so any study of CAFE needed to examine the course in widely varying situations. The selected colleges were chosen to demonstrate this. Comparative observations of CAFE provision were not being sought.

What follows is a description of four different interpretations of CAFE. They are described as Colleges A, B, C and D. They are referred to in this way throughout the findings of the research.

College A

College A is on the fringe of the Sydney metropolitan area. The area is one where public housing dominates, though not all students were living in public housing. The student group was of diverse cultural backgrounds. There were at the time four CAFEs running, one was a Koori CAFE with mixed S and T stages, one was a T stage CAFE, one was D stage and one was F and S stage. The F and S stage operated with a 15:2 student/teacher ratio and was team taught, with literacy and numeracy timetabled on different days, but sharing themes. The majority of the students had an English speaking background (ESB). It was offered only six hours per week, with no electives. A reduced number of *RAWFA* classes were also offered, but *Maths Workshop* was no longer being offered.

Students in the Koori CAFE were enrolled at S and T stages, though levels were considered to have little relevance in terms of learning outcomes for these learners. This course was running full-time and 12 students attended. All work was fully integrated within themes such as Sport, Endangered Species, Growing up Aboriginal and Music, which were negotiated with the students with assistance from the Aboriginal coordinator. Integration of literacy and numeracy learning within themes was seen as the key to the course's success. Electives included Locally Adapted Elective (used for making and selling handcrafts). The coordinator saw the course as successful because she was able to abandon some of the conditions of CAFE and work

very flexibly. An brief account of this course was published in *Literacy Now* (Ackers 1996).

College B

College B is a small rural college. Sixteen students were enrolled at the beginning of 1996 and at the time of interview 10 remained, after several obtained seasonal work in a nearby tourist area. The student group was a mixed
one. It included ESB and NESB students and two students with intellectual disabilities. The ESB students were long-time local rural people, the NESBs were of various Asian backgrounds.

CAFE was run part-time, and students attended 11 hours per week. Literacy and numeracy were integrated, and teaching was across S, T and D stages. This was the only way CAFE could operate because of enrolment numbers. The only student enrolled at F withdrew and re-enrolled as a 1:1 *RAWFA* student. Several of the students who enrolled at S stage then progressed to T stage, thus reducing the teaching ratio, which had been 50 per cent team teaching with 15:2 during first semester, but became 15:1 with some additional tutorial support. Both technical and general electives were offered. These included First Aid, Computers, Keyboarding, Learning by Contract and Locally Adapted Elective.

RAWFA classes also operated, as they had done before CAFE was introduced. *Maths Workshop* was never an option here because of low student demand in a rural area.

College C

College C included two colleges located near each other in a major regional centre outside Sydney. Both full-time and part-time CAFEs were offered, with students enrolled at F, S, T and D stages. One CAFE was a group of unemployed people between 18 and 50 years old, mostly ESB on various government benefits. Another included F, S, T and D stages with many CES referred students, most of whom were teenagers. This CAFE was run with the technical electives from Painting and Decorating. There was also a Get Skilled CAFE, which was a Labour Market Program, with students at T and D stages.

Both colleges also had part-time CAFEs with composite F, S, T and D stage classes. They offered a variety of electives, eg Computers and History Foundations. The part-time CAFEs proved to be much more successful

for the F and S stage learners, because it was found that students needed preparation before they were ready to study 20 hours per week. A reduced number of *Lit/Num Prevoc* classes still were being offered.

Both colleges operated most sessions with 15:2 ratio, with literacy and numeracy separated most of the time, though teaching literacy and numeracy with shared themes.

College D

College D was a Sydney suburban college, in an area with a large NESB population. Here the decision was made to move as far as possible into teaching using CAFE. At the time, five CAFEs were operating at F and S stages, and all were on a part-time basis. Students were enrolled in core modules in the mornings and evenings and some students attended electives in the afternoons or evenings, so they attended two full days at TAFE. The students had the option to enrol in electives, and most chose to do so. The electives offered were Computer, Personal Computer and Learning by Contract. Literacy and numeracy were integrated, and were team taught in most classes with a 15:2 teaching ratio. Two F and S stage CAFEs were operating at night. The only *RAWFA* provision was for students who need a low teaching ratio, such as 1:1 or 2:1. *Maths Workshop* operated for four hours per week.

6. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The findings in this report consist of data analysed from interviews with CAFE coordinators (who were also teachers on the CAFE course) and some CAFE teachers. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at Colleges A, C and D, with more than one teacher present in each case. A telephone interview was conducted with one teacher at College B.

The interview data is supported by data from the questionnaire respondents (also teachers) and the interview with the Project Manager for the writing of the CAFE syllabus, as well as course documents (CAFE Manual, 1994).

Organisation of findings

The findings have been divided into three major categories with subgroups, as follows:

1. The learning pathway for learners in CAFE F and S stages
    - 1.1 Placement: CAFE F and S stage or *Literacy/Numeracy Prevocational*?
    - 1.2 Moving from *Lit/Num Prevoc* to CAFE
    - 1.3 Initial assessment and placement in stages
    - 1.4 Starting at F stage
    - 1.5 Moving through stages
    - 1.6 Assessment through the course
    - 1.7 Moving beyond CAFE
2. Course content in relation to learning at F and S stages
    - 2.1. Themes
    - 2.2 Integration of literacy and numeracy
        - 2.2.1 Numeracy and maths
    - 2.3 Electives
        - 2.3.1 General education electives
        - 2.3.2 Technical vocational electives
    - 2.4 Learners' outcomes

3. Organisational factors and their impact on F and S stages learners.

3.1 Learning in stages
- 3.1.1 Teaching ratios
- 3.1.2 Learning in groups
- 3.1.3 Learning in composite classes
- 3.1.4 Talking to students about learner stages

3.2 Hours of study
3.3 Length of time in the course
3.4 Results
3.5 Terminology
3.6 The CAFE Manual

1. The learning pathway for learners in CAFE F and S stages

As learners move into and along the CAFE pathway, different factors have implications for learners.

1.1 Placement: CAFE F and S stage or *Literacy/Numeracy Prevocational?*

The comment most frequently made by research respondents throughout the research was the need to retain the flexibility in ABE provision by continuing to offer an alternative course to CAFE, such as *Lit/Num Prevoc*.

In many TAFE colleges in NSW a choice between the two courses, CAFE and *Lit/Num Prevoc*, currently exists for placement of students by teachers. A detailed description of CAFE and an overview of *Lit/Num Prevoc* is provided in Chapter 3. The research findings show how important it is to teachers that a choice is maintained.

CAFE is intended to meet individual learner needs. The CAFE Manual states that 'Context areas [are] chosen on the basis of students' expressed goals.' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 5) and 'Units of Work ... provide recommendations for content and authentic materials' (p 6). 'The course is intended to be adapted by teachers for the specific needs of their students' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part B, p 31). The Project Manager described CAFE as being 'designed to allow for a notional "content", while allowing learners to work individually within it'. He said, 'CAFE will meet these needs. It can be individualised, based on students' needs'.

Teachers identified implications for learners' success in meeting their individual learning needs that depend on which of the above courses they are initially placed in. All teachers interviewed agreed that placement in CAFE F and S stage will not be a suitable option for all learners with low literacy and/or numeracy skills. They emphasised the need to have *Lit/Num Prevoc* available as a safety net, particularly for beginning students who lack confidence, because of the increased flexibility they see it can offer to meet individual learner needs.

This finding is supported by the questionnaire data. Question 11 asked:

> *'Do you prefer CAFE with F and S; Lit/Num Prevoc; or Both OK?'*

Twenty-seven of the 38 respondents indicated *'Both OK'*, suggesting a desire to maintain the option of *Lit/Num Prevoc* for the placement of some students (Table 2). This data was supported by comments from many respondents who stated appropriate placement in F and S stages or *Lit/Num Prevoc* depends on the individual learner.

Table 2

Q11: Do you prefer	
CAFE with F and S stages	5
Lit/Num Prevoc	4
both OK	27
No response	2
Total	38

Opinions from interviewees varied about specific criteria that would make placement in *Lit/Num Prevoc* more appropriate than CAFE at F or S stage. Teachers at College D compared F and S to an entry-level *RAWFA* or *Maths Workshop* class, and so place most appropriate students in F and S stages in the same way they would previously have been placed in *Lit/Num Prevoc*. They said learners can meet individual goals from CAFE F and S stages. Teachers at all other colleges have made more distinctions between F and S stages and *Lit/Num Prevoc*, as follows.

At College B the teacher said, 'Some students are not ready for the challenges, or group work [which CAFE is seen to foster although it is not mandatory in the syllabus], or the technical electives or may have special needs'. Teachers at the other colleges echoed these criteria, and elaborated

with the following categories: students who want to learn very specific things; those who do not want to study for a certificate; those who have been out of education a long time and who are often early school leavers; people who have limits on study time; learners who do not have the skills to progress to T or D stage of CAFE. Learners with major learning difficulties or psychiatric problems may not be suitable for CAFE. A wariness of putting learners where they might encounter failure was evident. Teachers at College C said, 'As long as we have CAFE and *Lit/Num Prevoc* and we try to get appropriate placement, we don't have a problem'. A teacher at College D said, 'If students are vulnerable we don't put them in structures that are graded'. At College A teachers felt students were already being disadvantaged by a cutback in the number of *Lit/Num Prevoc* places available. Even though the criteria teachers cited reflected the interpretation of CAFE that had been implemented at their colleges, there was considerable consensus on the categories they described.

Comments from questionnaire respondents indicated that *Lit/Num Prevoc* and CAFE at F and S stages are seen as two different provisions, and that teachers want this to remain the case. Respondents emphasised the need for flexibility to meet the needs of different students. Two learner characteristics mentioned by respondents were learners with low self-esteem and low-level beginning students.

1.2 Moving from *Lit/Num Prevoc* to CAFE

The Project Manager described CAFE and *Lit/Num Prevoc* as parallel courses, not a progression. However, all teachers interviewed argued that CAFE F and S stages can be a useful progression from *Lit/Num Prevoc* for those students who need it, and they frequently use it in this way. At College C, the teacher's comment that 'Students gain confidence in *Lit/Num Prevoc* that helps them succeed later in CAFE' was repeated by several interviewees. It is seen as a good way for students to move into a learning environment. Questionnaire comments supported this notion of *Lit/Num Prevoc* providing a positive learning experience which motivates learners to continue and be successful in CAFE F and S stages.

When appropriate, teachers at College D place those students who need it in 1:1 tuition for a short time and then into CAFE. A teacher at College C said that students who do not have *Lit/Num Prevoc* before entering CAFE F and S stages take longer to settle into study and are not seen to do so well. Teachers at College A saw the movement from *Lit/Num Prevoc* as a small group to large group shift, as classes are operated with two teachers and 15 students. They see this as not necessarily beneficial to students, even though the teaching ratio has changed little. The teacher at College B saw CAFE

either as a progression or as an alternative to *Lit/Num Prevoc*, so it is not necessarily a pathway, though it is 'a great preparation' for CAFE. At College A teachers saw this progression as a good way to move people on from becoming entrenched in *Lit/Num Prevoc*. They commented that students see moving to CAFE as a promotion, though this may not be the case if the student really needs individual tuition.

1.3 Initial assessment and placement in stages

The stages in CAFE are based on notions from the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (ACTRAC 1993a). 'CAFE covers two of the Stages of Competence of the National Framework - assisted competence and independent competence' (CAFE Manual, Vol 1, Section 1, Part D, p 49). The purpose of core modules at F stage and S stage is to provide students with the skills and strategies to perform effectively *when assisted* (Vol 2, p 2; Vol 3 p 2), with texts that are *mainly familiar*, with *everyday* content at F stage (Vol 2, Section 1, p 2), and with texts that provide a *range of familiar*, with *some unfamiliar, everyday* content at S stage (Vol 3, Section 1, p 2). The CAFE manual provides indicators for initial student placement in the appropriate CAFE stage. Examples of indicators of literacy and numeracy competence for placement in F stage are as follows: 'Students do not need to demonstrate any numeracy/literacy competence for entry to this stage' and in S stage, 'Can perform relatively simple tasks with mainly familiar content' and 'With teacher assistance' (Vol 1, Section 2, Part D, p 7).

Teachers interviewed said that students recognise the stages F, S, T and D as levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. They acknowledged difficulties in assessing and placing learners in levels, and stressed the importance of making appropriate placements for the learners to be successful and not lose confidence. At College C teachers said, 'The question of levels is a nightmare. You need to enrol cunningly. We're learning this'. Teachers at College D saw inappropriate placement as disempowering. They added, 'If students are selected well then the potential for failure is reduced'. An added difficulty in making placements is the question that exists about the standard of the levels, and how the levels compare from college to college. The syllabus offers few guidelines to draw distinctions between levels. A teacher at College A commented, 'It is very hard to distinguish between F and S stage students'. The teacher at College B echoed this, saying, 'What is my S? What is yours?' Teachers at Colleges A and C both considered that enrolling all F and S stage students at F would allow time for more accurate assessment because it is difficult to make the distinctions initially. Many questionnaire comments related to the need for the standardising of learner levels in CAFE F and S stages.

Teachers expressed great concern that students should not be undermined by their placement in low levels. This was found to be a bigger issue in composite F, S, T and D stage classes, where F and S stage learners compare themselves unfavourably to T and D and lose confidence. One teacher interviewed warned about students being labelled by the rest of the group as 'dumb'. At College D a teacher said that students do not notice grading if it is handled sensitively, and that it is very important that teachers are positive when they place students as this flows on and influences their success. A questionnaire respondent indicated difficulty with the sensitive issue of placement, 'Students don't know if they are F or S. They just know they are part of the CAFE course'. This raises an issue about the rights of students to have access to a full understanding of their course.

The teacher at College B felt that there is the potential for students to compare themselves with each other more than *RAWFA* students do. In College C, levels are only talked about 'incidentally and individually' as necessary to avoid these comparisons.

The questionnaire responses showed that enrolment adjustments are very widely used by teachers to adjust the levels learners are placed in (see Table 3). If the enrolment is adjusted down a level, two interviewed teachers noted some students see this practice as demotion. A teacher at College D disagreed, 'If you adjust students down a level, it can be done sensitively, as a positive thing'.

Table 3

Q 7: Have you used Enrolment Adjustments to avoid students receiving a Fail result?	
Yes	24
No	11
No response	3
Total	38

In the Koori CAFE, levels are not seen to have any bearing on progress. Progress is related to the way the group functions rather than individual learner characteristics. For this reason the coordinator would like to enrol all Koori students at F stage to maximise the flexibility of CAFE for the whole group. Koori students self-select for CAFE. They make an informal visit to the class for a day with a friend or family member to see if they want to come back the following year.

1.4 Starting at F stage

Teachers from three colleges questioned the success of F stage in CAFE and some questionnaire respondents also raised this question. Teachers have not seen students at F stage achieve learning in the same way as in *Lit/Num Prevoc*. One questionnaire respondent said, 'I'm happy with S. F is the problem'. At College B the teacher said, 'I'd think carefully [before enrolling a student] in F. They'd have to have other strengths to carry them'. The only student she had enrolled in F 'didn't last the distance'. At College D, teachers see F stage as a very low grade *RAWFA* and use it widely, but only part-time. They likened their F and S stage classes to *Lit/Num Prevoc*. They felt that learning in F stage is not meant to be overwhelming, and that the 1:1 alternative does exist if needed.

A questionnaire respondent said additional difficulties are seen at F stage in a composite F, S, T and D group, where F stage students need a lot of time and don't get the attention they need. This respondent added that F stage students are seen to lose confidence in the large group and are more aware of their low skills.

Teachers interviewed see part-time study as more appropriate than full-time for F stage learners. Only College C provided full-time study at F stage, and then only because they were required to do so to meet Social Service provider requirements. At College C students self-selected for full-time study at F and S stages in order to qualify for funding, or because they wished to undertake electives, when only core modules were offered in the part-time course.

1.5 Moving through stages

In spite of concerns about appropriate placement in CAFE (see Section 1:1), learner pathways through CAFE are seen to open up a wide range of opportunities for learners, and are seen by most interviewed teachers to be one of CAFE's strengths. At College D a teacher said, 'It makes students more conscious of where they are going and that's a positive'. Teachers at College C have group discussions about learner pathways, and a teacher at College D pointed out that students are able to see their own progression because of the pathway through CAFE levels. Students see CAFE as a 'proper' course with learner levels and pathways and this is good for student self-esteem.

Questionnaire responses indicate that in many colleges, but not all, most students have moved between levels, thereby using the pathway CAFE provides. (See Table 4).

Table 4

Q 4: Have students re-enrolled in the next level?						
	none	few	some	most	no response	Total
from F to S	1	6	3	21	7	38
from S to T	1	7	9	14	7	38

Teachers interviewed at three of the four colleges illustrated greater variation in learners' use of pathways. They said they did not see students at F and S stages move as quickly between levels as students in higher stages. Students who come into CAFE at higher levels (T and D) are seen to achieve learning outcomes better. At College C a teacher said, 'Most people who start at F and S never get to D'. Many teachers agreed progression is not possible for some students, and so they experience the situation the teacher at College B describes, 'We're trying to exit half and continue half. Five will move from S to T and they are committed to progress. One student screamed through to D'. A teacher at College A described a similar situation, 'We've seen movement from F to S, but the next big hurdle to T is more difficult'. They also want to exit half and continue half of the students. They commented that they gave up on S stage being harder than F stage because no one was passing. (See Section 1.3 on the distinctions between stages).

Interviewed teachers agreed that students can satisfactorily leave at any level if they have met their individual learning needs. Some students exit at F, S or T stages with a *Statement of Attainment of Adult Foundation Education* (SAAFE), enabling them to gain recognition for the level of study they have completed.

Teachers saw some disadvantages in the use of pathways through CAFE. A teacher at College C asked, 'What do you do with someone who is working hard but is not ready to pass? You run out of [pathway] options'. Teachers at College A felt that the idea of CAFE is that students move on, and 'when they don't they think they've failed'. A teacher at College C said, 'If they can't get to D they think we've failed them'. The certificate at the end creates stress for students who do not think they will achieve it. One questionnaire respondent commented that some F and S stage learners want to get a certificate, but it is not always a realistic goal.

The time needed for students to achieve the learning outcomes of one level before moving to the next is discussed in Section 3.3.

1.5.1 Degree of difficulty between stages

The degree of difficulty between levels emerged as an important issue. The course manual says: 'There are not sharply discrete stages in the development of competence' and that 'two important variables in the development of language, literacy and numeracy are *complexity* and *familiarity*. As modules develop from F through to D the conditions under which learning and assessment are to take place reflect increasingly complex activities and less familiar contexts.' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part B, p 28). The course manual does not provide specific detail about learner's skills for placement in levels (as discussed in Section 1.3), although it does provide examples in the units of work (Vol 6). The difference between levels is realised in practice by a shift in teaching ratios from 15:2 in F and S to 15:1 in T and D stages.

Teachers at two colleges identified a big difference in the degree of difficulty between S and T stages. At College A the shift from S to T is called 'the big jump' by students as well as teachers. At College C teachers see difficulties for students when they pass at S stage but won't be able to pass at T. They described a result of this situation as 'level creep', where students are caught in 'this level thing' and gradually the standard of the stage drops as people move to the next level. This is more of a danger while there is no moderation process to help colleges consistently anchor levels.

1.6 Assessment through the course

Although there are 15 individual learning outcomes for each core module, the CAFE Manual states, 'Each learning outcome is not assessed separately. Any assessment should be focused on the module purpose'. Assessment can be by teacher observation and documentation, negotiated tasks, student portfolio. Assessment is continuous (Vol 1, Section 1, Part C, pp 38, 39). Self assessment is important: 'While self assessment is not a formal requirement of the course, it is an essential facet of the monitoring of progress in any adult basic education setting' (Vol 1, Section 2, Part D, pp 16, 17).

Formalised documented assessment is a new issue for learners at this level of basic education study, and teachers have identified both positive and negative implications for learners. Teachers' application of the above assessment methods vary from college to college, and from one unit of work to another.

Teachers interviewed showed they work hard to make assessment as non-threatening as possible. This finding is supported by questionnaire responses. Question 3 asks, 'Did pass/fail result requirements create

enrolment or assessment difficulties?' Nineteen colleges noted difficulties for teachers, but only six noted difficulties for students (see Table 5).

Table 5

Q 3: Did the pass/fail result requirements create enrolment or assessment difficulties?				
	Yes	No	No response	Total
For the teacher	19	15	4	38
For the student	6	25	7	38

In interview, teachers at College C said they plan assessments 'with outcomes that will encourage, not defeat F and S learners'. At College A, students are given the assessment dates well in advance and students tick each one when it is completed. In College D the content of the unit of work is assessed without use of technical assessment language. A teacher at College A said, 'The students don't know what assessment means. They only see it as a test. Because they don't know what self-assessment means we have to give them the experience of self-assessment'. A teacher at College C said, 'We've ended up with a CABE style assessment. After working on a theme we give a cumulative assessment'. Students in the Koori CAFE were assessed by their individual contributions to each section of a class book which covered the five units of work they had undertaken though the course.

Teachers at College D saw assessment as focusing for students; stating that it makes students look where they are going. The teacher at College B said that the high-quality feedback she gave students about the work they have done lets them know about their progress. Several teachers interviewed agreed that continuous assessment is not threatening and that students do get used to it.

Assessment is at times seen as threatening and students do sometimes respond with trepidation. In College A a teacher said about the first assessment for the year, 'When I said "We'll do assessment on Wednesday" three people were away'. Teachers at College D agreed that the competencies could be overwhelming, depending on how the issue is handled.

In technical electives, the more formal assessment required is seen to be difficult for F and S stages. Teachers at several colleges and a questionnaire comment noted that students feel exam anxiety and that it adds extra strain for the student. Some of the technical assessments are very hard and some

students will not be able to pass. First Aid is an example given. The teacher at College B said that she will work hard to show them how much they know now that they did not know before, even though they might not pass.

1.7 Moving beyond CAFE

The Project Manager stated that it was intended that CAFE provide legitimate pathways to vocational education or work, which were not formalised in CABE. These are in addition to pathways into general education, as included in modules as stated in the Course Aim (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 5).

CAFE at F and S stages is seen by all colleges to open up opportunities for learners. In rural areas this is seen as especially important where courses such as ESOL and CGE may not be available. CAFE with F and S stages provides an intermediate step by providing a general education pathway. The opportunity for technical electives gives learners opportunities to consider a technical course at some later time. Teachers at College D also suggested that 'in CAFE we are promoting the idea of progression beyond literacy and numeracy learning.'

2. Course content in relation to learning at F and S stages

The course syllabus provides suggestions for course content. 'The teaching resources, called Units of Work ... provide recommendations for content ... These Units of Work contain suggestions for classroom activities, suitable texts, mathematics and literacy topics, knowledge and skills, and socio-cultural issues'(Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 6).

CAFE is underpinned by the principle that 'numeracy and literacy are best developed in context', with 'context areas chosen on the basis of students' expressed goals. These three context areas determine the choice of contexts for the core modules. They are ... personal and social activity, further education and training, work and preparation for work.' Also 'The teaching resources, called Units of Work ... support the core modules'. (Vol 1, Part A, p 5). They include teaching suggestions for each of the four course levels, as well as suggestions for student assessment. The units of work lead to teaching in themes negotiated with the learners. The relationship between Units of Work and themes is shown in in the course syllabus (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 10).

Volume 6 of the CAFE Manual contains units of work. Some examples of units of work are: Buying a Car, Planning a Field Trip, Making a Claim, Federal Government, Maths for Eating, Maths for Further Study.

2.1 Themes

Interviewed teachers from all colleges saw teaching using themes as good, and that as a result teaching is more task, rather than skills, oriented. Themes are also used to integrate the literacy and numeracy components of the course. This is described in Section 2.2.

Teachers at College D pointed out that it is good for students to learn in context because they need to understand that everything they do in life is in a context. The ABE teachers at College C have been involved in a project to trial the National Reporting System (NRS). They have found the *Aspects of Communication* helpful in providing a comprehensive range of reading and writing tasks which they put within the framework of a theme, while recognising that the NRS document is not a curriculum (ANTA 1996, p 2).

Themes are often used to link teaching across core modules and electives. At College A, in the Koori CAFE, every aspect of the course is integrated into themes, including the electives. This is seen as one of the reasons for its success. The teacher described one theme they had used as an example. She said, 'We did Sport for six weeks. It involved research in the library, and we got poems, magazines, posters — whatever we could find about sport. Then their writing was all published in a book. They illustrated it and published it themselves'. They also based a lot of learning around the handcraft work they did (see the college description, Chapter 5). The teacher at College B also described this linking when they studied the First Aid elective. 'We ran Further Education and Training [a core module] concurrently with First Aid. For example, students would watch a video and have to take notes from it'. She also built units of work onto each other, for example, 'We built Budgeting into Holiday and Travel'. She added, 'The units of work are valuable as a starting point'.

2.2 Integration of literacy and numeracy

Although this research project did not set out to specifically investigate the integration of teaching literacy and numeracy, this issue emerged as an important one in the research findings. The report, *Pedagogical Relations between Adult Literacy and Numeracy'*(Lee, Chapman and Rowe 1994) provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between them. McGuirk and Johnston (1996) explore this issue in relation to CAFE in *Numeracy and Literacy: Integration at all costs.*

The CAFE manual states 'The core literacy and numeracy modules of the course have been designed as a single integrated learning experience' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 5). This is reinforced by the names of the core modules, each of which begins with the words 'Numeracy and Literacy for ...'. The Project Manager said, 'We tried to bring about a cultural shift in the field. This was a context issue — the course is a context-based course. We expected that integration of literacy and numeracy would mean that teachers would consult with each other on contexts, even if there were separate literacy and numeracy teachers'. He added that one of the things he had not been prepared for was the literal interpretation by teachers of the CAFE syllabus. He said, 'I was amazed that there was so much literal interpretation of this [integration of literacy and numeracy]'.

The syllabus does not define the concept of integrated literacy and numeracy nor specify ways of implementing the literacy and numeracy components of an integrated literacy and numeracy program. Thus the term 'integration' in regard to literacy and numeracy, and ways of implementing it, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this report a literal interpretation has been used, where colleges provide integrated literacy and numeracy teaching within the one classroom with the same teachers for both literacy and numeracy. This interpretation was chosen for practical reasons, because it is the one teachers involved in this research most often meant when talking about this issue in the interviews, and is how they have most often implemented the CAFE curriculum, although variations exist.

At both Colleges A and C, teachers found it very difficult to fully integrate literacy and numeracy at F and S stages, so separated the numeracy from the literacy for some sessions, while sharing teaching themes. Teachers at College C also found they needed to split F and S stages from T and D stages within the numeracy sessions because of the disparate needs of learners, which they found very difficult to adequately accommodate in an integrated situation with four stages in one group.

At College D, teachers felt that one of the strengths of CAFE is the integration of literacy and numeracy. They have been integrating them since before the arrival of CAFE, as appropriate to learners' needs and the particular teaching context. They considered it to be important that students see that literacy is in numeracy. A teacher at College A acknowledged she would have just skipped over the numeracy in a literacy class. She also observed that most students who do numeracy also want literacy, another good reason for integration.

Teachers at College D pointed out that integrated teaching helps students find their own numeracy gaps, such as NESB students finding they need the language of Maths and ESB students discovering numeracy is not just doing calculations. They also pointed out that if students do not want or need numeracy, they do not have to focus on it. These teachers gave examples of creative ways of integrating within themes, such as excursions. They did an integrated unit of work based on the local gardens.

Teachers from three colleges considered they give less priority overall to numeracy, pointing out that some units of work tend more to either literacy or numeracy, which can disadvantage students with numeracy needs.

A questionnaire respondent raised the difficulty of assessment when literacy and numeracy are integrated and students have different abilities in each area. Other responses also questioned the ability of the CAFE classroom to accommodate the disparity between individual student needs in literacy and numeracy.

Some teachers interviewed expressed feelings of inadequacy in meeting students' numeracy learning needs because they have never taught numeracy before, though teachers at College D consider all ABE teachers have the skills they need to teach numeracy in CAFE, particularly at F and S stages.

2.2.1 Numeracy and maths

These terms are not defined in the CAFE syllabus, and are the subject of confusion in the adult basic education field (*Literacy and Numeracy Exchange* No 2, 1993, p 17). In her report, Lee's (1995, p 9) distinction of social purpose and context as the distinguishing characteristic between maths and numeracy is used. She makes the distinction 'between traditional conceptions of "mathematics" as a body of content and "numeracy" as the use of mathematics in the achievement of social tasks'. She argues that numeracy 'can never be an autonomous category, conceived outside a context of use'. Therefore in this report, maths is taken as decontextualised mathematical ability and numeracy as a contextualised 'at homeness with numbers' (Cockcroft (1982) in *Literacy and Numeracy Exchange* No 2, 1993 p 16).

Teachers at some colleges experienced difficulties using themes in numeracy with F and S stage students who need to build basic mathematical skills. At College C, teachers found that it is not always possible to accommodate the hierarchy that they see as inherent in maths as it arises in a theme. Teachers at several colleges think maths is more difficult when it is embedded in context than out of it.

Teachers at all colleges saw the need to provide individual programs for some students in maths. At Colleges D and C, *Maths Workshop* has been retained for this purpose. The teacher at College B suggested that students who need it could use the elective Learning by Contract to meet individual maths needs. *Maths Workshop* is no longer offered at College A and the teachers interviewed now feel unable to meet the maths learning needs of all their learners.

Some learners struggle with the concept of integrated literacy and numeracy, because it does not fit their expectations of 'maths'. Teachers at two colleges told of students who felt they were unable to pass a stage of the course because they had not 'done any maths'.

2.3 Electives

CAFE offers both general education electives and technical vocational electives. The CAFE Manual states, 'The general and technical education and training elective modules provide students with additional contexts for using their literacy and numeracy competence and opportunities to develop the competences needed for further education, training and work' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 6). Technical electives are a CAFE innovation. The Project Manager said, 'We would provide the context and a vocational course accreditation which would help students later'. They are designed to provide pathways into technical education.

In the colleges where electives are offered to F and S stage students, interviewed teachers see great benefits for most learners. Electives offer opportunities for students to extend their literacy and numeracy skills in the core modules. Teachers have been surprised by the student demand for electives, even by low-level students. The electives are seen to offer broader learning opportunities for students.

2.3.1 General education electives

Teachers interviewed indicated that the two most popular general electives are Learning by Contract and Locally Adapted Elective. These are 'shell' electives, so are able to be used to meet individual or group needs which may not be covered by the core modules. At College B the teacher said that Learning by Contract has helped people learn independence through keeping a log, which has made them more focused in their learning. She also successfully used Locally Adapted Elective to address the personal problems of the group, with students learning to access local community resources. An example was a very successful visit from the hospital nutritionist. Teachers at both Colleges C and D indicated there was a demand for

the CABE elective, Writers Workshop, which is not offered in CAFE. Locally Adapted Elective has been used to cover this demand.

In the Koori CAFE, the two shell electives were used for their handicraft work. The electives were used to enable students to cover all facets of the work, such as making the goods, preparing them for sale, selling the goods and managing the money.

At College C, the general elective Work Experience was offered to support a vocationally oriented CAFE. This was so successful that other ABE students have requested to do it next semester.

2.3.2 Technical vocational electives

The technical electives have also mostly proved successful. They offer an opportunity for 'additional contexts for developing literacy and numeracy competence' (Vol 1 Section 1 Part A p 6). Teachers gave examples of how students broaden their learning by using literacy in different contexts, eg note taking in First Aid at College B. The more practical and broader coverage of skills they offer is seen as an advantage which for some students has led to changes in their personal or study lives. For example, after completing the technical elective Personal Computer, it was reported that several students now use computers in their personal lives.

Offering technical electives does raise issues for learners at F and S stages. The CAFE Manual acknowledges the complexity of enrolling students at different levels in both general and technical electives, saying 'they should be delivered in supportive yet challenging ways' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 23). However, offering enough support to F and S stage students in the delivery of technical electives was found to be difficult when technical elective teachers may have little understanding of the needs of ABE learners. One teacher said she would think very carefully before putting F stage learners in technical electives. Teachers at two colleges said they needed a Tutorial Support teacher from ABE to team teach with technical teachers, as technical teachers often have little understanding of the needs of ABE learners. A questionnaire comment supported this, saying, 'It is hard to find suitable teachers for mainstream [technical] electives'.

The Personal Computer technical elective has been used by several colleges and found to be very successful, though at College C a teacher noted that students found the shift to a *skills*-based course, not a *learner needs*-based course was difficult. The teacher at College B found that the First Aid course needed to be extended by a few sessions to give the students the time they needed, and she was able to do this. She considered the course to be

successful, even though not all students would achieve a pass result. Not all technical electives have been successful. Painting and Decorating was offered at College C, but the young students who were initially very enthusiastic did not complete the elective.

Comments were made by both questionnaire respondents and interviewed teachers about issues related to assessment of technical electives for F and S stage learners. The issues that arise in relation to this are discussed in Section 1.6.

2.4 Learners' outcomes

The term *learners' outcomes* is used here in a broad sense to reflect the variety of outcomes learners achieve, not the 15 learning outcomes of CAFE.

The concept of what the learner will gain is stated by the Project Manager, who said the course was based on notions of students 'not only gaining literacy and numeracy competence, but developing as learners and developing confidence.' He elaborated, 'It was really important that we recognised and incorporated all the outcomes of ABE, not just literacy and numeracy'. The core *module purposes* incorporate these ABE outcomes. Assessment is to *module purpose* (see Chapter 3, p 32).

Research findings reflected these notions of what the learner gains. Teachers talked about learners' outcomes at F and S stages in terms of confidence, independence, focusing learning, changing goals and empowerment. Many of the positive outcomes from CAFE can be recognised as good outcomes from ABE programs generally. However, some new positive outcomes are also found.

Teachers interviewed said that CAFE fosters independence and encourages learners to move on, though two teachers said the assessment methods make it difficult to measure how much independence learners have achieved (an issue related to the lack of detail provided for a profile of each stage of CAFE). At College C, the pathway provided in CAFE is seen as empowering because learners are able to see a way ahead into future study. At most colleges, teachers said that independence is the goal, as it always has been in ABE. A teacher at College C said the outcomes from F and S stages are often good because students are more focused to an end point. At College B, the teacher saw learning outcomes as more extensive and richer than those from *Lit/Num Prevoc* because of the range of skills covered and because of more group interaction. Students are receiving a range of experiences, both group and individual.

Teachers agreed outcomes from CAFE F and S stages are broader than from *Lit/Num Prevoc*. Broadening of horizons is due to the wider range of experience that CAFE can offer. Teachers at College D said they actively facilitate that. Another gain is increased confidence, though this is not an outcome that is new in ABE. People who come with a need and succeed, build confidence. A teacher at College D said, 'When people build confidence they change their needs and aspirations. Their perceptions change and they broaden their opportunities'.

Both interviewees and questionnaire respondents indicate that good outcomes in CAFE depend on appropriate placement of students. They said when students have been appropriately placed in CAFE F and S stages, comparisons of outcomes with *Lit/Num Prevoc* are favourable.

Some of the outcomes for learners in F stage are discussed in Section 1.3.

In the questionnaire, responses to Question 14: *Compared to Lit/Num Prevoc, do you think learning/personal outcomes for students from CAFE at F and S are better, the same, not as good?* varied widely, but many teachers indicated learners' outcomes from CAFE are better than from *Lit/Num Prevoc* (see Table 6). Nine respondents made additional comments about learners' outcomes being dependent upon the individual learner and their needs. One claimed that CAFE is better for Aboriginal students. Interviews reinforced the finding that there are wide variations in the outcomes for learners.

Table 6

Q 14: Compared to Lit/Num Prevoc, do you think learning/ personal outcomes for students from CAFE at F and S are:					
better	the same	not as good	different	no response	Total
13	6	7	3	9	38

3. Organisational factors and their impact on F and S stage learners

The organisational structures are examined in detail in relation to their implication for F and S stage learners.

Many colleges saw benefits in the structures themselves. Most colleges mentioned that students are positive about the idea of a 'real' course.

Colleges B and D believe this helps students to focus on their learning, though College A warned the idea of a 'real' course can be different from the reality, especially for learners who are unable to follow their study through to a conclusion. College C observed that the course brings home to F and S stage learners the reality of what study is like.

3.1 Learning in stages

3.1.1 Teaching ratios

CAFE provides a teaching ratio for CAFE at F and S stages of 15:2, and T and D stages of 15:1. For stages F and S, the CAFE Manual states, 'The successful implementation of these modules calls for this detailed assistance and also demands a large amount of negotiation between the teacher and individual students, small groups or the whole class on a range of issues including module content, learning and working styles and assessment. As a result the student — teacher ratio for these modules is set at 15:2' (Vol 2, Section 1, p 26).

The Project Manager said, 'We were prepared for the suspicion of the 15:2 ratio'. However, most questionnaire responses to Question 12: *Is the 15:2 teaching ratio of CAFE at F and S good, OK, bad, not much different?*, said the teaching ratio is good, showing widespread acceptance (Table 7). Some comments from questionnaire respondents who considered the ratio to be good were related to the group work that it facilitates. Some negative comments related to the difficulty of meeting the individual needs of some students in the bigger group. Ratios become very complex in composite F, S, T and D stage classes.

Table 7

Q 12: Is the 15:2 teaching ratio of CAFE at F and S good, OK, bad, not much different:					
good	OK	bad	not much different	no response	Total
24	6	4	2	2	38

In 1996 the ratios were interpreted literally by all four colleges interviewed, with 15 students enrolled in one class with two teachers most of the time, except in composite F, S, T and D classes, where the ratio was varied according to TAFE enrolment procedures. Many questionnaire respondents

also indicated they were using a literal interpretation of the ratios. However, other variations (such as 8:1 and 7:1) are not precluded by the syllabus.

At Colleges D and A, CAFE operated with F and S stages together. In College D, 15:2 is seen as 'terrific'. Teachers are able to split into groups if needed, and this is educationally very successful. However, a teacher at College A felt that the centrality of the learner is sacrificed in the teaching ratio, and she would like to split into separate F and S stage groups in 1997, which is a possibility in CAFE. Some questionnaire respondents commented that individuals can get lost in the class of 15 students. One wrote, 'In some cases I have lost people who found bigger classes daunting'.

At Colleges B and C, CAFE operated across all levels and so ratios became complicated. However, the College B teacher found that having one teacher for the first half of the lesson meant she could have a whole group focus for this part, then having two teachers for the last part allowed for more individual work. This arrangement was very successful for students. At College C, teachers found the four stages in one class was difficult. (This is further discussed in Section 3.1.3.) The use of a Tutorial Support teacher for most sessions meant the course could mostly operate with two teachers, which was needed as in this class several students were only 15 years old and needed a lot of assistance.

Some teachers interviewed admitted the temptation exists to enrol more students at S stage than T stage to increase the teaching ratio, because meeting individual needs can be so difficult. One college considered it would be possible to run two groups with 8:1 teaching ratio at different times, perhaps with one a numeracy class and one literacy class. But these styles of delivery have not been implemented in these colleges to date, though some questionnaire respondents indicate they have organised classes this way, and the syllabus does not preclude this arrangement.

One questionnaire respondent wrote that she felt the students were disadvantaged because her institute did not permit the enrolment of any students at a 15:2 ratio, and therefore all literacy and numeracy students were enrolled at 15:1. Another questionnaire respondent said, 'Ratios are not much different only because I was allowed to run at 8:1'.

3.1.2 Learning in groups

The one difference interviewed teachers at all colleges identified between CAFE F and S stages and *Lit/Num Prevoc* is the focus of the teaching to a group rather than to individuals, although the CAFE Manual does not explicitly state that CAFE is a course with a group focus. However, several of

the 15 learning outcomes of the course focus on the learner as part of a group, eg, Learning Outcome 1: 'Students can set and evaluate goals and strategies for themselves and their group/s.' and Learning Outcome 4: 'Students can interact in pairs and groups to engage in and evaluate the activities for developing and achieving individual and group goals', and there is a widespread perception in colleges that CAFE has a group focus.

Some interviewed teachers missed the individual approach to teaching and learning, but others said that students enjoy the bigger group and this is one of the strengths of CAFE. The teacher at College B said, 'The group interaction is different. I use the group dynamics more and there's more of a group culture. You can't get that in *Lit/Num Prevoc*. We run lots of group work. For example in [the unit of work called] Learning about Myself we did problem solving and pair tutoring happened'. Teachers at College D agreed with the benefits of the group dynamics, though they commented that students find it easier at F stage to slot into a small RAWFA group than a CAFE with 15 students. A questionnaire respondent wrote about group work, 'The greatest value is in the social component'.

3.1.3 Learning in composite classes

An important finding that emerged was the need to combine F, S, T and D classes at a large number of colleges. The comments from 11 questionnaire respondents indicated they have enrolled students in composite classes across F, S, T and D stages, though this question was not directly asked. They wrote that this was necessary because of low enrolment numbers. They expressed difficulty with this arrangement, eg, 'It's very difficult to pitch a lesson that meets F and D needs in a composite class', 'CAFE is not suitable for beginning students in mixed F, S, T and D groups', 'Students at F stage have very limited numeracy, literacy and learning skills and take up much time'.

In the interviews, opinions were divided about the benefits of composite classes, and success with mixed groups was related to the group at the time and how well the group of students 'gelled'. In College B, the class across S, T and D stages was very successful. The teacher found it was good for the S stage students to be in the class with T and D. There was good student interaction, and the language opportunities for the NESB students were good. The class provided within itself good models for student learning and good peer tutoring. There were no F stage students in this class. Not all composite classes worked out this well. In two colleges teachers struggled to teach effectively to a wide variety of skills. In College C the teacher said, 'You have to accommodate T and D at the same time as F and S. T and D see F and

S getting a lot of individual attention.' A teacher at College A said, 'It is the age-old problem. You favour students in the middle and at the top'.

3.1.4 Talking to students about stages

This proved to be a sensitive issue for most teachers interviewed. A teacher at College C said, 'We talk about levels incidentally and individually, as needed for student planning'. She explained that talking about levels brings in a hierarchical structure that disadvantages learners at F and S stages. Teachers at College A agreed that levels should not be discussed in front of the class 'because you pigeon hole people'. In College B students are encouraged to look at where they are in relation to themselves, not to the rest of the class. Here the teacher puts a table of levels and pathways on the whiteboard and explains what they have to do to pass.

The teacher at College B said that when she explains course levels, she explains the features of 'with assistance' and 'independently', and encourages the notion of independence.

3.2 Hours of study

CAFE allows much flexibility here. The CAFE Manual states 'The course can be offered flexibly. Normally it will be offered for 20 hours per week full time and face-to-face. However, part-time, distance and mixed mode options to meet the needs of students will be appropriate' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, p 22). The Project Manager said the CAFE course was necessary 'to meet the full-time options for learners at pre-CABE levels'. CABE only met the full-time study needs of students equivalent to CAFE's T and D stages.

Questionnaire responses show that 16 colleges have enrolled all or most students full-time at F and S stages, and 13 have enrolled few or none full-time (Table 8). This high number of full-time F and S stage students was not reflected in the interviews.

Table 8

Q 13: Have you enrolled many students in CAFE at F and S as full-time students?						
all	most	some	a few	none	no response	Total
3	13	6	3	10	3	38

Teachers interviewed at all colleges felt that part-time study is more successful for F and S stage learners than full-time, though at College C it was necessary to offer it full-time. Teachers at one college commented that part-time F and S stages are good preparation for later full-time study. In part-time CAFEs, colleges offer between six hours (for core modules only) and 11 hours, with core modules and a variety of electives, plus some Tutorial Support. At College D, there was enough flexibility to be able to offer one Abstudy student the full-time study he needed, and teachers encouraged students to choose programs to suit their needs and interests. Most students chose to do the computer elective. In College B, where only 6 hours of *Lit/Num Prevoc* could be available, the teacher welcomed the opportunity for students to increase their hours of study. She saw their progress increase as a result.

3.3 Length of time in the course

The CAFE Manual states that full-time students can spend between 180 and 216 hours on the core modules for each stage if this is necessary to meet their needs (Vol 1, Section 1, Part A, pp 22, 23). The Project Manager said, 'In CAFE all hours are notional. Notional means a minimum number of hours. So you can do as many core module hours as you like'. This is a wider variation in the time of study than CABE used to allow. The questionnaire responses showed that there are many students who need more than one semester to pass F or S stage of CAFE (Table 9). In some situations enrolment as a part-time student means more time is needed.

Table 9

Q5: Have students needed more than one semester to pass one level?						
none	few	some	most	all	no response	Total
3	9	14	10	1	1	38

Teachers interviewed had various responses to this; some liked the freedom for students to take the extra time, and others perceived that CAFE F and S stages lacked the openness of *Lit/Num Prevoc*. A teacher at College D noted that students are interested to know that there is one semester for each level and that they can finish in that time or extend it, but emphasised that students need to know about time and semesters in advance. Teachers at two colleges commented that the uncertainty of the length of the course is threatening for students at F and S stages, where the length of study time for any individual cannot be known on enrolment. One teacher said she had had

dependent learners who have been enrolled in S stage for three semesters and who 'are not shifting'. The teacher at College B said students do have enough time at each stage, and she keeps the compulsory core module going all year so they have more time to pass it. Teachers discussed a range of innovative enrolment and results plans to enable students to have the time they need. Comments made in questionnaire responses indicate that this is much easier to achieve if the initial enrolment is in Semester 1 than Semester 2.

Many questionnaire comments indicated that many or most students at F and S stages need more than one semester to complete a level of CAFE, with many students on extended delivery. One wrote, 'Many students are not ready to move up after one semester'. Other teachers enrolled for both semesters. Some colleges allow students to enrol part-time in a full-time course, which is 'a necessity in small colleges where numbers don't allow two *Lit/Num Prevoc* classes'. Some colleges said they offer CAFE part-time because there are not enough students to offer it full-time.

3.4 Results

TAFE provides guidelines for use of results codes in the *Results Codes Procedures Manual* (TAFE 1996). Because CAFE is an accredited course, it has necessitated awarding of results for the first time to learners at F and S stages. The CAFE Manual states that that assessment is 'Locally set and marked', with 'Continuous Assessment: Pass/Fail' (Vol 2, Section 1, p 21). This raises the question of whether the fail result is appropriate for people who may be entering a learning situation with a background of educational failure and negative educational experiences.

The questionnaire responses to Question 2: *Of the students enrolled so far, what results have they achieved?* showed that in Semester 1, 1996, of the 31 colleges that have awarded marks, only six colleges awarded fail results in core modules. Many comments indicate a reluctance on the part of teachers to award fail. This raises the issue that if fail is not appropriate, then in what way can learners be given a result that allows them more time to study and then pass, without offering another unsuccessful learning experience.

Interviewees' and questionnaire respondents' comments indicated that in some situations a fail result was awarded in technical electives, where the mainstream TAFE requirements mean students at F and S stages are more likely to experience failure. At College B, the teacher said some students at S stage may fail First Aid.

All teachers interviewed agreed that they would not award a fail result for any learner at F or S stage who was serious about their learning. Teachers in College C were facing the problem of learners who would pass S stage, but not be able to pass T. To avoid this situation, teachers were learning to enrol cunningly to give learners options for repeating a stage. One way they achieve this is to enrol a student in two of the three core modules, leaving a module available in that stage to use for enrolment adjustment or re-enrolment the following semester. The teacher at College B made the point that students get enough anecdotal feedback through the course to understand their progress.

Teachers explained how they handle results issues in different ways.

Use of enrolment adjustment (see page 52). Twenty-four colleges confirmed in the questionnaires that they have used enrolment adjustments to avoid students receiving a fail result (Table 4). Teachers can do this in three ways: enrol adjust the student down a level (which students may view as demotion); adjust the enrolment form one semester to a full year to give the student more time; adjust the enrolment to an unused core module of the course if the student has initially only been enrolled in two of the three core modules.

Using Fail. Teachers agreed they would mostly avoid the use of fail. However at College D, teachers said they would use fail for students who have not put any effort into their learning and did not achieve module purpose. Two colleges said they would re-enrol a student for a second semester, then if the student is unable to successfully move on, exit the student with a SAAFE.

Using other results codes. Teachers use a variety of other results codes, for example Multi-Year Enrolment, Received Tuition or Deferred Result, to give learners more time in a stage without using Fail. All these codes stipulate regulations for use that require careful analysis before being awarded. (Results Codes, TAFE NSW, 1996) Even with the use of these result codes it is difficult to gain more than two semesters at any stage. Some teachers feel this is not a bad thing.

3.5 Terminology

Because the learning outcomes of the core modules are derived from competences of the *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence* (CAFE Manual, Vol 1, Section 1, Part D, p 49), and because of the accreditation requirements of the time, the introduction of CAFE has meant the introduction of the language of competency-based

training. Teachers interviewed at all colleges agree this is very difficult for students.

When explaining the course to students, teachers at two colleges said they do it in stages, beginning with Information Day and adding complexity gradually as they move through the course. Many teachers avoid the use of competency-related jargon, a teacher at College A pointing out, 'It's impenetrable for people who find jargon difficult'.

Teachers at two colleges mentioned the TAFE requirement of giving assessment information at the beginning of the course. However, the language of the assessment information is very difficult for students, so teachers talk about assessment in terms of literacy or numeracy goals, and gains students have made.

The 15 learning outcomes of CAFE are in complex competency-based terminology, which, as the teacher at College B said, is difficult even for teachers. Teachers at three colleges mentioned using the plain English version of the learning outcomes that was written by Northern Beaches College of TAFE.

Teachers at all colleges agreed that explaining the name of the course presents its own problems for students. The CAFE Manual states that the name is 'a result of feedback from teachers and students about the term "basic" ' and 'to assist teachers and students to differentiate between the old and the new courses during the transition period' (Vol 1, Section 1, Part B, p 27). A teacher at College D commented, 'The greatest weakness of CAFE is its silly name. It's embarrassing and students are uncomfortable with it'. A teacher at College C said, 'Students are confused about what they are studying. They say they are in the TAFE course, not the CAFE course'. A College D teacher points out how important it is for students to be able to explain their course in a credible way to their friends and families.

3.6 *The CAFE manual*

The course manual provides the interface between policy and implementation, and so is relevant to this research because it has implications for the way the course is delivered to F and S stage learners. The Project Manager stated that it needed to be written in competency-based language to meet accreditation requirements. (The format of the manual is described in detail in Chapter 4.)

All teachers interviewed were critical of the manual, and many teachers have refused to engage with it. The interview data indicated that many teachers

have not tapped into the resources is offers for implementation of CAFE, or understood the organisation of the manual. Interview data indicates this resistance to the manual is related to its size, difficulty finding the desired information and the use of language of CBT.

However, those teachers who have spent much time reading the manual find it contains the information they need. Teachers at College D said that although they see the document as an ideological one, not a practical one, they are able to use it flexibly to suit their own situation. They see it as a set of guidelines, not rules. The teacher at College B said that the things she needs are in the manual, but they are hard to find.

Some teachers interviewed described the manual as overwhelming with information being difficult to access. One teacher commented, 'When a teacher asked what students have to do to get a certificate, we had to look in three separate places to put together the information we needed'. A teacher at College A commented, 'It's six volumes and seven kilos were so disappointing'. It is interpreted by teachers at College A simply as an accreditation document with little practical use as a teaching syllabus, and other teachers echoed this frustration with it. Some teachers considered they receive little guidance from the manual for course content. Many part-time teachers have not read it, relying on their CAFE coordinators for an interpretation. A teacher at College C said: 'I've just found the annotated Index tucked away at the back! It's got some really useful stuff'.

The teacher at College B said if she didn't use the units of work there would be nothing to focus on, and she finds gaps in it that she would like to discuss with other teachers. Teachers at College D agreed, saying it is hard to find where it actually tells you about assessment. At College C, teachers said that because the manual does not meet their needs, they have turned to the National Reporting System, which they were piloting at the time, even though the NRS explicitly states that it is not a curriculum document. One teacher said, 'A numeracy teacher who looked at the manual said, "What do I do?" Another teacher commented that if she had not taught CABE she would not know where to start. The notes on the general electives were found to be helpful. Teachers considered it measures up badly to the CABE manual, which they considered offered much assistance to teachers.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this chapter the major findings are summarised, followed by other significant findings from the research.

Major findings

1. The most consistent finding of the research is that CAFE does not meet the learning needs of all ABE students in NSW TAFE. This finding came from all teachers who took part in the research, including teachers who consider the outcomes of CAFE at F and S stages to be excellent. All teachers agreed about the need to retain alternative literacy and numeracy provision to CAFE.

2. CAFE at F and S stages has been successful in retaining the overall positive outcomes of other ABE courses, particularly *Lit/Num Prevoc*, for *most* students. These include outcomes such as gains in confidence, gains in independence, and gains as learners, as well as gains in a good range of literacy and numeracy skills. However, this finding is not true for all students at F and S stages. Significantly, students who have previously been enrolled in *Lit/Num Prevoc* are seen to have had a good preparation for CAFE F and S.

3. CAFE at F and S stages is seen to offer broader outcomes than were previously available to entry-level learners, due to the wider range of experiences that CAFE offers through context-based teaching, group interaction and use of electives, and by stating more explicit learning outcomes.

4. CAFE at F and S stage is seen as focusing. Teaching in themes in a context-based course helps students focus on their learning in a way which is coherent. Many students are positive about CAFE as a 'proper course', with accreditation. Moreover, a pathway to accreditation helps students focus towards an end point, and to move on through the pathway offered. The group work, which is seen as a characteristic of CAFE delivery, fosters group interaction, which most teachers see as positive. In many cases, assessment is also seen as focusing.

Other findings

Some issues were consistently raised by teachers implementing CAFE, which impact on learners. These have both positive and negative implications, but are problematic in some situations. They are as follows:

1. Initial assessment and appropriate placement in levels

   Accurate placement is seen as integral to learners' success, but is difficult because of an absence of moderation guidelines. Teachers do not have clear indicators for each level and so expressed difficulty with initial placement, assessment for progress and consistency of levels between colleges. Placement of students in levels was seen as a sensitive issue as students had their confidence undermined when this was not handled carefully. Talking to students about levels of learning was also seen as a sensitive issue.

2. Length of study time in each level and pathways through CAFE

   Difficulties arise for students when they cannot complete the tuition offered in a level of CAFE, and need more time to achieve a pass result, and therefore are not ready to progress to the next level. This can undermine confidence in a learner at F and S stages by presenting them with a sense of failure. Students can also set unrealistic goals because they see in front of them a pathway through levels and a certificate at the end. To overcome this, teachers suggested a variety of enrolment options to maximise flexibility of study time at each level.

3. Assessment and results

   Assessment tasks are seen to create anxiety for some learners. This is a greater problem in technical electives. Teachers expressed concern about the effect of a fail result code on ABE learners at F and S stages and are careful to avoid the use of fail when possible. There is widespread use of enrolment adjustment forms and alternative result codes to avoid giving students this sense of failure and to give them the time they need at F or S stages.

4. F stage students

   Teachers commented about difficulties meeting the needs of F stage students in composite CAFE classes, particularly where learners ranged across F, S, T and D stages. Although full-time study is not compulsory at F stage, when these students studied full time, their

success is doubtful. Part-time study is a more frequently seen attendance pattern and was found to be more successful. The rate of progress of F stage students is seen as slower than that of learners at the higher stages. Questions were also raised about F stage students in vocational electives.

5. Composite F, S, T and D classes

Many colleges with small numbers of CAFE enrolments are forced to combine the four CAFE levels in one class. Teachers find it difficult in this situation to meet all the learners needs. This also raises confidence issues for the F and S stage learners.

6. Integration of literacy and numeracy

This is an issue that concerned many teachers. Of particular concern are situations where individual students have abilities in literacy that differ from their abilities in numeracy, and in classes where students have a wide range of skills. Teachers do not think they meet all learners' numeracy needs in these situations. They find it difficult to cover the range of maths skills they need to teach in a situation where literacy and numeracy are integrated. Some students consider they have been taught no maths when their literacy and numeracy teaching is integrated. Furthermore, some teachers lack confidence to teach numeracy as well as literacy. Added to this, there is considerable debate about what 'integration' really means.

7. Teaching ratio

Although there is widespread acceptance of the 15:2 teaching ratio for F and S stages, some teachers question the possibility of retaining student-centred learning in groups of 15 students, even if there are two teachers in the class. It should be noted that the CAFE syllabus does not require a literal interpretation to be made in the implementation of the 15:2 teaching ratio.

8. Terminology

Teachers find it difficult to discuss the technicalities of the course with students. Areas such as assessment requirements, learning outcomes, course levels (and their names) and even the name of the course itself, as using the language of competency-based training (CBT) can be inaccessible to students.

9. Reducing diversity of ABE provision

This research highlights the need to retain diversity in ABE provision. In several situations, teachers felt they were no longer able to meet all their learners' literacy or numeracy learning needs because diversity of provision has already been curtailed. This has occurred in situations where colleges no longer offer the ABE non-accredited course *Lit/Num Prevoc* and either of the subjects, *Maths Workshop* or *Reading and Writing for Adults* (*RAWFA*), or are unable to offer enough of these classes to meet their learners' needs.

8. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, conclusions are drawn from the research findings about the implications for learners in CAFE at F and S stages. The outcomes from learning that occurs at the intersection of ABE and accreditation under NTRA are considered. These outcomes are related to the non-negotiable features of NFROT, to retention of foundational ABE values in CAFE, and to the choice of courses available for learners.

Although it can be concluded that the outcomes from CAFE are positive for most learners at F and S stages, the report demonstrates that these good outcomes do not extend to all learners.

Outcomes related to the structures imposed as a result of NFROT

The structures of CAFE have positive influences on outcomes for most learners. Most students are seen to be more focused in their learning in a course that is competency based; to use the learning pathways provided, to benefit from the broader options offered through the availability of general and technical electives and to be motivated by a course that offers certification. Teachers take care that most learners are not disadvantaged by their placement in learner levels, by formalised assessment or the need for results to be awarded.

Some students are seen to be disadvantaged by factors such as the necessity for formalised assessment procedures or the pace at which they are expected to move through the levels, and as a result may not be able to achieve their learning needs. Movement from S stage to T stage, ie from 15:2 to 15:1 teaching ratio, creates difficulties for some learners. The notion of a certificate at the end of the course also encourages some students to set unrealistic goals.

The lack of a means to identify the learner requirements for each learner level and for assessment purposes was widely acknowledged as a drawback of CAFE. This issue of moderation is a major one. This research provides evidence that the need exists for a moderation tool to be devised, for use between different colleges and within colleges. Teachers need to be able to compare levels between different colleges for purposes such as portability of

credentials to other colleges, and for realistic and valid progression to other courses. The credibility of the CAFE credential is at stake here. Within colleges, teachers also need to identify learners' competence for consistent placement and assessment of students, and to avoid the problem described by one college as 'level creep'. Teachers need to be provided with, or develop for themselves, a set of criteria so that they can work consistently within their college. The absence of a moderation tool led one college to use the NRS for this purpose. The use of this strategy needs to be explored further. However, the development of a moderation process raises issues for ABE good practice. In a situation of wide diversity across the state, such a tool could be interpreted as the equivalent of offering prescribed content. This is a consideration that needs to be taken into account in the development of such a tool. In Victoria, moderation of the CGEA 1 provided an opportunity for teachers to develop a common language of student progress (Sanguinetti 1995 p 14).

The language of accreditation in CBT can be seen as difficult for learners in CAFE F and S stages generally, as teachers struggle to explain to students the features of the course in CBT terms. This is an issue of the rights of learners to be provided with an understanding of the course in which they are enrolled. This right comes into conflict with traditional ABE practice of avoiding labelling learners' abilities. A way of providing accurate information to learners that is not inadequate, patronising or inaccessible needs to be established.

Associated with the terminology of the course is the CAFE Manual, and difficulties for teachers are found here. Because it was written in language that meet the needs of accreditation, and because of its size, teachers find it is alienating and difficult to access, though those teachers who have persevered with the manual have found it contains the information they need. A dilemma exists here between the usefulness of the contents of the manual, , and the difficulty accessing them. Because classroom decisions are made on the basis of the information teachers can take from the manual, this point of intersection between policy and practice is a crucial one. Teachers need to be able to adequately implement CAFE from the information they are given in the manual.

Outcomes related to the retention of foundational ABE values in CAFE

The good outcomes achieved in ABE provision generally have on the whole been successfully incorporated in CAFE. The overall success of the course can be seen as a result of the way CAFE was written to incorporate

foundational ABE pedagogies and values. Flexibility of implementation has been maintained to allow individual learner needs to be met in most cases. It has also allowed CAFE to meet the needs of diverse college settings and student groups as it stretches across the state, as it was designed to do. However, this success is not necessarily easy to achieve. Teachers must, and do, work hard to achieve it. Those teachers who look for the 'spaces' deliberately left in the curriculum to accommodate ABE philosophies, and who interpret it broadly, are more positive about CAFE and its outcomes, and are able to take advantage of the flexibility it offers. This was notably evident in the success of the Koori CAFE, which has implications for other diverse groups who wish to use the course in ways that meet their particular needs. Those teachers who are alienated by the curriculum, who do not see the flexibility it offers or do not know they have permission to interpret the curriculum other than literally have more difficulty implementing it and obtaining good ABE outcomes from it.

The traditional ABE approach of negotiating content of the course according to learners' needs and interests is successfully incorporated in CAFE by the use of themes, negotiated with students. This approach maintains the flexibility that has always been a feature of ABE.

Outcomes related to other factors

Some of the outcomes of CAFE result from those factors included in CAFE in order to fill perceived gaps in ABE provision. Other outcomes are related to factors that are new in ABE curricula, but are not related to the structures of the NTRA.

CAFE deliberately included the option of full-time study for F and S stage learners to fulfil a perceived need for it to be offered at the entry level of ABE. However, it was generally found that placement in full-time study, particularly of F stage students, created difficulties for learners, though those who had previously been enrolled in *Lit/Num Prevoc* were seen to be better prepared.

While the opportunities offered by the addition of technical electives, with accreditation, were considered to broaden outcomes for learners, this was dependent on appropriate selection of electives, and some were found to be inappropriate for F and S stage students.

Although the CAFE curriculum does not specify it, teachers identify CAFE as fostering a group focus, unlike *Lit/Num Prevoc* which is seen as fostering an individual focus for a class. Although this is a strong positive factor for

many, it was found to be an area of disadvantage for learners whose needs were not shared by the group.

Another factor for consideration that occurs outside the structures of accreditation is the integration of literacy and numeracy. It is difficult to draw conclusions about this from the findings of the research, except to say that although it is welcomed in some colleges and seen as appropriate for some students, it has brought with it a raft of issues (explored in Chapter 6) that are as yet unresolved, and so this area of CAFE urgently demands further investigation.

Another outcome of CAFE that is problematic is an administrative one. This is the requirement that colleges operate composite classes across the four stages of CAFE. It can be concluded that it is very difficult to meet the needs of students at the lowest level and students at the certificate level of CAFE in one class. Some institutes impose other administrative difficulties, such as bans on the 15:2 ratio, indicating that the course is subject to influences outside the control of ABE or Foundation Studies Training Division (known at the time of publication as Access Educational Services Division).

Outcomes resulting from the choices of courses available for learners

The structures of CBT pose difficulties for some students at F and S stages. Teachers generally were able to describe the types of learner who will fit this group. It was found that some students are disadvantaged by their placement in the stages of CAFE. Questions of placement in staged learning arise particularly for students placed in F stage of CAFE, who are seen to be precariously balanced on the edge of an accredited course. For these learners, the retention of a course such as *Lit/Num Prevoc* can provide an alternative to CAFE, or a stepping stone into accredited ABE study, which is seen as important.

In situations where the choice of provision has already been narrowed, all learners needs are no longer covered. It can be concluded that with the retention of an alternative ABE provision in addition to CAFE, the needs of ABE learners can be satisfactorily met. Learners will continued to be offered access to not just literacy and numeracy learning, and the achievement of individual goals, but also to further education and training, and work, in the current VET environment to which TAFE has a commitment.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has highlighted the need to retain diversity of ABE provision in TAFE NSW, so that those people who need it are not denied access to a learning pathway in the current VET environment. Recommendations are made with this requirement in view. Recommendations are also made to assist teachers as they interpret and implement the texts of CAFE, to help them find and use the spaces it allows. Further research is also recommended and would extend the work undertaken here. Of highest priority is research with students, which would offer a different perspective to that provided by teachers and described in this report. Such research would complement this work.

Retain diversity of provision

As the report indicates, there is an overwhelming need to retain diversity of ABE provision, such as is currently the case in those TAFE colleges where both CAFE and *Lit/Num Prevoc* are available. This is necessary so that all learners' needs continue to be met in ABE in TAFE, and so that an alternative to CAFE, and a progression from an unstructured course into CAFE and other courses is provided for entry-level learners. The significance of entry level opportunities in the form of *Lit/Num Prevoc* has been demonstrated throughout this report. It is essential that preparation for study in CAFE is provided for many entry-level learners. *Lit/Num Prevoc* has proved to be invaluable in fulfilling this role. The findings indicate that diversity of provision is needed to offer articulation into CAFE, and to provide other learner pathways. Those with literacy and numeracy needs must continue to be able to access further education in TAFE, and be provided with equal opportunities to gain employment. Without this diversity of provision, many learners will be denied the opportunities promised in the NTRA statements of 'equity in entry level training' (Allen Consulting 1994).

As *Lit/Num Prevoc* is currently due for review and TAFE demands new courses are accredited in CBT, it is recommended that models of such literacy and numeracy courses around Australia be evaluated, so that a course can be written and consequently re-accredited to maintain provision which, in addition to CAFE, meets the diverse requirements of entry level-learners.

Establish a statewide system of communication for CAFE

Because the picture of CAFE itself is one of diversity, there is a great need for teachers to share information and receive assistance and ideas from others. This report demonstrates that teachers struggle to interpret the CAFE syllabus, deliver CAFE and deal with the issues that arise; and a system of communication would offer much needed support. There are several forms this could take, for example a permanent statewide CAFE coordinator could be appointed, a magazine or newsletter could be published, an internet mailing list could be established and conferences or workshops could be organised. A combination of these would make access to information by teachers more feasible.

It would be useful to assemble a collection of models of CAFE provision. As CAFE is such a flexible course, it would be useful if teachers could access information about different models of CAFE delivery. The lack of specific implementation details in the course manual leaves many teachers unclear about the variety of interpretations of CAFE that are possible. A collection of models of CAFE teaching and assessment materials, and teacher-developed units of work would also prove invaluable to teachers across the state.

It would also be useful to collect information to provide teachers with suggestions of enrolment patterns and use of result codes. This would help teachers provide maximum flexibility for students, as well as award results that encourage, rather than defeat, learners.

Establish moderation guidelines

There is a great need for standardisation of levels in CAFE across the state. Teachers struggle to place students appropriately, assess accurately and consistently and move students beyond CAFE with confidence. Teachers need consistency between colleges and within their own college. This is not just an issue for students and teachers, but also for the credibility of the course certificate. However, it needs to be carried out in a way that recognises the diversity of CAFE, and does not cause CAFE to become limited to a prescriptive curriculum.

Review terminology

Students are entitled to the information contained in their syllabus in language that is accessible to them. Students in literacy and numeracy

courses have different needs to students in other courses and this should be recognised in the documents that are relevant for them, such as in the descriptions of modules, in the learning outcomes required, and in the enrolment and assessment details. Such materials should be produced. The name of the course should be included when considering the revision of terminology.

Teachers also find the language of CBT inaccessible. While the language remains inaccessible to teachers, they are unable to adapt it well to suit students.

Review the CAFE Manual

Because teachers express frustration and even alienation with the manual as a whole, a review of the ways it presents and supports the CAFE syllabus is necessary. Although the information teachers need is contained in the manual, consideration also needs to be given to making the document one which is not alienating and difficult to use. Teachers express the need for more teaching support than they find in the manual, and ways need to be found to provide this and to foster positive attitudes to the CAFE course.

Conduct further research in CAFE

Issues that arose during the research project highlighted the need for further investigation. Some areas indicated that require further research are:

1. *Integration of literacy and numeracy.*

   Research is needed into literacy and numeracy outcomes from integrated classes, non-learning outcomes that arise in integrated classes, ways colleges are interpreting and implementing integration in CAFE, and issues that arise for teachers and students as a result of an integrated approach to literacy and numeracy teaching. Issues such as providing a balance between literacy and numeracy tuition, teaching and assessing students who have a disparity between their literacy and numeracy abilities, the perception of a hierarchy in maths acquisition and the demand that teachers be able to teach both literacy and numeracy, all need further investigation. Additionally, a clarification of the meaning of the term 'integration of literacy and numeracy', as it applies to CAFE, is needed.

2. *Profile of F and S stage CAFE students*

What makes a student suitable for CAFE or suitable for *Lit/Num Prevoc*? Teachers agree that not all students are suitable for CAFE. A profile of ABE learner characteristics, learner needs for appropriate placement in CAFE, or in alternative provision, would help teachers make placements that would encourage learner success. This, like the issue of moderation, would need to be achieved in a way that meets ABE philosophy, without creating a system of skills assessment, but recognising student diversity in order to foster appropriate placement.

3. *Composite F, S, T and D classes*

Research is needed into the impact of this situation on students both at the lower and higher stages within the class, and the effect on students' learning outcomes. The issues for teachers in terms of ability to reach all students' learning outcomes, particularly in classroom management needs to be further examined.

4. *F stage students in CAFE.*

This research found that teachers were concerned about the results of placing F stage students in a CAFE course. It would be useful to explore the implications of placing students in F stage of CAFE. The placement of students in full-time courses at F stage also needs investigation.

5. *Effectiveness of Lit/Num Prevoc*

The research strongly demonstrated the reliance teachers currently place on the availability of *Lit/Num Prevoc*. It would be useful for future planning to establish through further research the extent to which this course is effective in achieving learning outcomes. This research could take the form of a 'destination survey' of a group of students, conducted over a period of time.

Another possible research project associated with an investigation into the effectiveness of *Lit/Num Prevoc* would be an investigation into the relative cost effectiveness of that course as a form of entry-level provision, compared to CAFE.

6. *NRS for CAFE moderation*

In addition to the need to establish moderation guidelines, there is a need to explore the usefulness and appropriateness of the NRS for CAFE moderation purposes. If the NRS is found to be useful, further investigation may suggest ways of doing so.

7. *Student perceptions of CAFE*

As this research has been conducted only with data collected from teachers, it would be useful, and add value to this work, to extend it by conducting further research with students. This could involve researching issues such as:

- students' perception and understanding of the course they are enrolled in
- understanding of their placement in levels, use of learner pathways, assessment procedures, awarding of results
- the implications of these structures for their learning
- the importance of accreditation and where CAFE outcomes may lead
- accessing course information through the terminology of CAFE.

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